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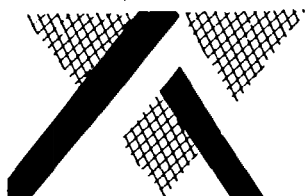


TEARS

MELODRAMA | MUSIC | MORTALITY

SCREEN

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VOLUME 27/NUMBER 6/NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 1986

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MELODRAMA

AN INTRODUCTION BY ANDREW
HIGSON AND GINETTE VINCEDEAU

In this issue, *Screen* returns once again to the question of melodrama in television and cinema. Studies of melodrama have developed over the years from the primarily auteurist studies of the films of Douglas Sirk and others in the early 1970s, to the consideration of melodrama in film (and romantic fiction in literature) as a genre of particular interest in feminist debates about women and patriarchal ideology. More recently, the woman's picture has been explored in film studies, while television studies have opened up questions about soap opera, and peak-time serials such as *Dallas* and *Dynasty*¹. What emerges from this history is first the pervasiveness and the resilience of debates about melodrama, and second the fact that melodrama has become one of the few sites on which film studies and television can meet.

There is at the time of writing something of a debate raging in Britain about the status of popular television, and its relationship with its audiences, which suggests that film studies and television studies still occupy rather different grounds, particularly in so far as textual analysis is concerned. For much of the Left, popular television still has the status of a mind-numbing drug, despite all the advances in analysis of popular culture over the last fifteen years or so. In an intense reaction to this attitude, another position has developed which enjoys a post-modern revelry in popular television's often parodic play with form, with the notion of pleasure seemingly altogether divorced from the realm of social relations. Clearly, to state the position as quite so irrevocably opposed is to offer something of a caricature; what is more important is the relationship between the two tendencies². Judith Williamson, in a recent article in the British Labour Party magazine, *New Socialist*, argues against the latter tendency. Like Frederic Jameson, in his sympathetic critique of post-modernism generally, she decries the loss of critical

distance—specifically the failure to examine the contradictoriness of popular cultural forms³. There is, at the same time, much work to be done on the use of television texts by audiences, especially work which can take into account the sophistication of contemporary textual analysis⁴.

The question of how to read the discursive strategies that make up texts has, of course, been one of the strengths of film studies: to be able to grasp the textual system as always more than a unitary object, with a singular 'message' or 'effect', and to construct it as complex, multi-layered, composed of often competing, contradictory discourses and modes of address (although, as Paul Willemsen has pointed out, this process of reading can become

¹ For various considerations of this history of melodrama studies, see *Screen* January-February 1984, vol 25 no 1, also Christine Gledhill, 'Melodrama', in Pam Cook (ed), *The Cinema Book*, London, British Film Institute, 1985, pp 73-81.

² See for instance Jane Root, *Open the Box*, London, Comedia, 1986; Laurie Taylor and Bob Mullen, *Uninvited Guests*, London, Chatto and Windus, 1986; Carl Gardner, 'Populism, Relativism and Left Strategy', *Screen* January-February 1984, vol 25 no 1, pp 45-51; and Ian Connell and Lidia Curti, 'Popular Broadcasting in Italy and Britain: Some Issues and Problems', in Phillip Drummond and Richard Paterson (eds), *Television in Transition*, London, BFI, 1985.

³ Judith Williamson, 'The Problems of Being Popular', *New Socialist*, September 1986; Frederic Jameson, 'Post-Modernism, or the Cultural Logic of State Capitalism', *New Left Review* no 146, August 1984.

⁴ See in this context the research of Ann Gray, 'Women and Video: Subject-Text-Context', in Helen Baehr and Gillian Dyer (eds), *Boxed In: Women on and in Television*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul (forthcoming); also Ann Gray, 'Video Recorders in the Home: Women's Work and Boys' Toys', paper at the International Television Studies Conference, 1986; Dave Morley, *Watching Television: Cultural Power and Domestic Leisure*, Comedia (forthcoming); Ien Ang, *Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination*, London, Methuen, 1985.

an obsessive search for a progressive, because fissured, text⁵). Melodrama (in all its different inflections) has been central to such analytical work, with the ideological tensions of desire, sexuality and the social in patriarchy being seen as its mainspring.⁶ Indeed, this is precisely the point of entry for Susan Boyd-Bowman's article in this issue on two Powell and Pressburger melodramas of the 1940s, both recently re-released in Britain: do *Gone to Earth* and *Black Narcissus* make a spectacle of patriarchal ideology?

Work on the gendering of subject positions has also enabled a key shift to take place in studies of genre since the early 1970s which concentrated on the male-oriented gangster and Western genres. The feminist-inspired desire to focus on texts traditionally popular with female audiences (and derided by male critics), shifted the attention to studies of melodrama and the woman's picture. At the same time, these studies moved from conceiving genre as a structure (of binary oppositions, of iconographies and themes) to seeing it as a process of spectator-text relations: that is, a processing of narrative and point of view, subject position and desire. One of the central texts in this re-formulation of genre studies was Steve Neale's monograph, *Genre*⁷. In this issue of *Screen*, Neale further explores the melodrama as a processing of spectatorial pleasure, 'the pleasure of being touched and giving way to tears'. In order to explain why we cry while watching melodramas, following Moretti, he reappraises the genre in terms of a series of relationships or tensions: between knowledge and point of view; between spectator and character; between the fateful logic of the melodramatic narrative and the powerlessness of the spectator to intervene; and between the narrative structure of melodrama (wherein there is always the possibility of the fulfilment of desire being 'too late') and the fantasy structure of melodrama (wherein the union of the lovers, the fulfilment of desire, is always possible).

Boyd-Bowman draws on Neale's thesis in order to explore the narrativisation of a dualism within female desire in the films which she considers; she goes on to examine the differences between British and US film melodramas by comparing Powell and Pressburger's *Gone to Earth* with the Hollywood version supervised by Selznick, partly re-shot by Mamoulian and re-titled *The Wild Heart*. Inevitably, she finds it difficult to disentangle such an exploration from the auteurist mythologisation of

Powell and Pressburger within contemporary British film culture, and that thorny opposition of melodramatic passion and English 'tastefulness'. In the end, then, her argument is as much about authorship as it is about melodrama and national cinema.

The melodrama and the musical genres have also traditionally enabled critics to consider that neglected area of film studies, sound. This is true of several articles in this issue, but the shift from study of the image to study of the function of the soundtrack is most pronounced in Carol Flinn's article⁸. Flinn considers film music as a process of signification in its own right, one that is not necessarily dependent on the image track (a point also made by Mark Finch in relation to *Dynasty*) and concludes her article with an analysis of the complex function of film music for the spectator in classic Hollywood melodramas such as *Now Voyager* and *Backstreet*.

Flinn, Boyd-Bowman and Neale are all primarily concerned with textual analysis, and, especially Neale and Flinn, with the textual processing of the spectating or listening subject. Mark Finch's article on male gay discourses and *Dynasty* goes a stage further by drawing on traditions of analysis from both television and film studies. He too conducts a detailed analysis of the textual work of *Dynasty*, never simply celebrating this most popular of television programmes, but looking in particular at the way in which it articulates two competing male gay discourses, the discourse of camp and the liberal discourse of the contemporary gay movement. Interestingly, Finch argues that the confusions of the serial in its struggle to maintain heterosexual romance and to recuperate homosexuality can only in the end be resolved from a gay male point of view, and indeed one which is camp rather than liberal. But, in addition to this textual analysis, Finch also looks at the concrete uses of *Dynasty* by a

⁵ See Paul Willemen, 'An Avant-Garde for the Eighties', *Framework* no 24, Spring 1984, p 62.

⁶ See Laura Mulvey, 'Douglas Sirk and Melodrama', *Movie* no 25, Winter 1977-78.

⁷ Steve Neale, *Genre*, London, BFI, 1980.

⁸ See also *Screen* May-June 1984, vol 25 no 3, an issue devoted entirely to studies of film sound; also Andrew Higson, 'Sound Cinema', *Screen* January-February 1984, vol 25 no 1, pp 74-78; and E Weis and J Belton (eds), *Film Sound: Theory and Practice*, Columbia University Press, 1985.

4 specific audience, British gay men. In so doing, he comes near to combining those two forms of analysis that Annette Kuhn outlined in a previous issue of *Screen*: studies (usually in relation to television) which consider the audience as a sociological category, occupying specific social positions; and studies (primarily of film) which consider the spectating subject as a process of the text.⁹

In examining *Dynasty*, Finch also addresses the question of the serial's 'perpetual postponement of closure', while Neale centres part of his argument on melodrama endings. What their concern with this particular aspect of the melodramatic narrative shows, perhaps most clearly, is that if melodrama is the terrain on which film and television can meet, it is also the genre which presents most acutely a fundamental difference between the two media, that of narrative resolution. Early studies of melodrama concentrated on narrative closure as the site of (more or less successfully contained) ideological contradictions, as in, say, Douglas Sirk's films. More recently, Jane Feuer¹⁰, among others, has addressed the question of whether television melodrama could be said to operate a critique of its own reactionary ideology by virtue of the open-endedness of its narrative. Finch and Neale's papers depart from the ideological argument *per se* in order to examine the relationship between the text and the spectating subject in terms, for example, of emotional investment, expectations, etc. Neale forcefully argues that timing is crucial to the effectiveness of film melodrama upon the spectator and particularly his/her feeling of powerlessness—the sense of the characters achieving the same knowledge as the spectator but *too late*. However, in television the predominant 'present tense' combines with the *sine qua non* condition of the serial/soap form (that it must 'go on') to alter radically one of the basic narrative features of the genre compared with its film model. The finality of many melodrama endings—e.g. Hazel's death in *Gone to Earth*, the fire in *Rebecca*, etc—does not operate in serials, where, as is well known, even mortal accidents are not necessarily terminal (as shown by the fate of Fallon in *Dynasty*, which Mark Finch discusses). This is not to deny that the roots of *Dynasty* and other similar television serials lie in the Hollywood melodramas of the '40s and '50s, as Finch for example argues, but to stress that the process of reworking/quotation operated by these serials upon their main intertext is a complex one in terms of narrative, in view par-

ticularly of the two media's different temporalities.¹¹ Arguably, this is also the case in terms of spectacle. The *mise-en scène* of television serials can be reminiscent or even parodic of Hollywood melodrama, but the precise conditions of looking at or engaging with that *mise-en-scène* can never be the same for television as for cinema, 'if we agree, with John Ellis (quoted by Mark Finch), that television is a medium which 'engages the look and the glance rather than the gaze'¹². The relationship between film and television melodrama, usually taken as one of unproblematic filiation, is obviously an area which will need further attention.

Looking at melodrama—on film or television—from another perspective, that of *pleasure*, it is on the other hand possible to see that these differences may be more apparent than real. As Tania Modleski has argued, 'the narrative [of serials and soaps], by placing ever more complex obstacles between desire and its fulfillment, makes anticipation of an end an end in itself'.¹³ Taking this point further, Neale, agreeing with Elizabeth Cowie, argues that pleasure in narrative derives from the story-telling rather than from the ending. Thus, he says, an 'unhappy' ending (in film melodrama) is still pleasurable because it *postpones*—and thus still renders possible—the wish fulfilment. In other words, in film as in television, to quote the title of Douglas Sirk's 1955 melodrama, 'there's always tomorrow'.

This model is of course the structure of fantasy, where pleasure lies in the working out rather than the obtaining, in the eternally deferred nature of desire (hence perhaps the special pleasure afforded by serials where complete resolution is near-impossible). But if this structure is inherent to all narrative forms, the particularity of melodrama as a genre—as Neale argues—may be seen to lie in the

⁹ Annette Kuhn, 'Women's Genres', *Screen* January-February 1984, vol 25 no 1, pp 18-28.

¹⁰ Jane Feuer, 'Melodrama, Serial Form and Television Today', *Screen* January-February 1984, vol 25 no 1, pp 4-16.

¹¹ Thomas Elsaesser, 'Melodrama and Temporality', 1984 Ancona Film Conference, 'Hollywood in Progress—the 1960s'.

¹² John Ellis, *Visible Fictions*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982, p 128.

¹³ Tania Modleski, 'The Search for Tomorrow in Today's Soap Operas', *Film Quarterly*, Fall 1979.

specific *kind* of fantasy activated by its discursive practices. Hence the recourse to psychoanalysis in consideration of melodrama, and this is clearly the case with the articles in the issue.

Whereas the emphasis in many recent analyses of melodrama has been placed on sexuality, Neale argues for a distinction to be made between sexuality and *love*. For him, and it is a point which Boyd-Bowman takes up in her article, one of the major narrative strategies of melodrama is to provoke the spectator's wish for the union of the (usually heterosexual) couple, and, he goes on, 'the root of this wish lies in a nostalgic fantasy of childhood characterised by union with the mother: a state of total love, satisfaction, and dyadic fusion'.

One crucial question arising out of this interpretation is whether such a fantasy is universal – or whether it should be seen, as Flinn suggests, as part of a regressive 'male scenario of nostalgia', or even, as many feminists have argued, as an acknowledgement of female power and therefore part of an affirmative feminist discourse. Flinn's argument is developed in relation to music. As she points out in her well-documented examination of music and psychoanalysis, music has been traditionally associated by male critics with the feminine, and pleasure in music (and sounds generally) seen as akin to a restoration of the maternal object. However, what has on many occasions been co-opted by male critics into a reactionary position (e.g. music = the ineffable = the feminine) can also be a feminist weapon – Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva for example have both insisted on the importance of music to a woman's discourse, and the links between music and the maternal. Flinn, for her part, concludes her article by suggesting that while music may not be 'essentially feminine', it can 'offer woman a discursive place in which her desire is provisionally articulated'.

The same argument can be used in the larger context of the fantasy of maternal reunion. The important point is, then, *whose* fantasy is it? If the

desire to recover the 'lost plenitude of the pre-Oedipal bond with the mother (the Lacanian Imaginary) is universal, is its value under patriarchy necessarily different for a female protagonist (and spectator)? In *Imitation of Life*, which Flinn and Neale discuss, female bonding is prominently articulated, and there is a spectacular celebration of female power through music. Also, as Neale shows, the failure of the fantasy of mother-daughter reunion is painfully worked through (the 'too late' effect at its most poignant with Sarah Jane trying to reach inside her mother's coffin).

But perhaps the most important female couple in *Imitation of Life* from a feminist perspective today is that of Lora and Annie, for it articulates most clearly the dialectics of female bonding: that of sameness (they are both women and mothers) and difference (of class and race). As Jane Gallop has argued in the context of women and writing, 'the women of another class who serve us recall the mother, recall her attentions to our material needs'¹⁴. This question, of sameness and difference, greatly outruns the field of melodrama and will be the focus of the next issue of *Screen*. At Annie's funeral, not only Sarah Jane, but Lora, the diegetic audience, and the spectators in the cinema, all cry for the lost mother, because, as Neale also argues, whatever the ending, it is *always* too late.

Too late, but it is the very impotence of the spectator which rivets him/her in the cinema seat or the sitting room sofa; powerless, yet unable to go away. Modleski, who has argued the long connection between melodrama and mothers, points out how in television serials the (good) mother 'must sit helplessly by as her children's lives disintegrate'¹⁵. The apparently powerless mother (whether 'good' or 'bad') could be a mirror image of the melodrama spectator, one of the best fictional representations of which may be found in Zola's *Thérèse Raquin*. In this classic novel, Raquin's mother, bedridden and *mute* after the murder of her son by Thérèse and her lover, has to sit and watch the criminal and adulterous couple tear each other apart. Like her, the spectator of melodrama, paralysed and impotent, moved to tears, can only listen and watch the drama unfold, clinging to the fantasy that there's always tomorrow.

¹⁴ Jane Gallop, 'Annie Leclerc Writing a Letter, with Vermeer', *October* no 33, Summer 1985.

¹⁵ Tania Modleski, *op cit*.

MELODRAMA AND TEARS

BY STEVE NEALE

¹ Denis Diderot, 'On Dramatic Poetry' in Barrett H Clark (ed), *European Theories of the Drama*, Crown Press 1965, p 238.

² See Sheila Page Byrne, *Tears and Weeping: An Aspect of Emotional Climate Reflected in Seventeenth Century French Literature*, Jean Michel Place, 1981.

³ The nineteenth century critic Geoffroy, cited in Charles George Bird, *The Role of Family in Melodrama*, Josta's Publications, 1976, p ix.

⁴ Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, Yale University Press, 1976, p 12.

⁵ For an outline and discussion of the issues involved in verisimilitude, see Gerard Genette, 'Vraisemblance et motivation', *Communications* no 11, 1968.

MELODRAMA EMERGED ON the stage as a consequence of the development of a new theatrical genre, somewhere midway between tragedy and comedy. Among the proponents of this new genre in France was Denis Diderot, who identified one of its major components and pleasures, as follows:

If to a nation which has known only one sort of play—light and pleasing comedy—one were to propose another, serious and touching, have you any idea what it would think of it, my friend? Unless I am very much mistaken, the intelligent people, after having conceived it as a possibility, would not fail to say: 'But what use is this new form? Does not life give us enough troubles without our inventing additional, imaginary ones? Why allow sadness to creep into the world, even of our amusements?' The remark of one who knows not the pleasure of being touched and giving way to tears.¹

These remarks were made at a time when weeping had a particular significance. It was central to the cultivation of a sensitive and sentimental moral sensibility.² Nevertheless, they pinpoint a feature crucial to melodrama, a feature which, despite an ever-growing body of writing on the genre, has rarely been addressed: its ability to *move* its spectators and in particular to make them cry. I want in this article to discuss 'the pleasure of being touched and giving way to tears' as a crucial component of melodrama and, in particular, to identify some of the elements and conventions involved in producing both the tears and the pleasure. I shall start by looking at two typical characteristics of melodrama's mode of narration.

The first of these concerns the way in which narrative events are ordered and motivated. As has often been noted, melodramas are marked by chance happenings, coincidences, missed meetings, sudden conversions, last-minute rescues and revelations, *deus ex machina* endings. Melodramatic narration involves 'continual surprises, sensational developments'³, constant violations in the established direction of events, 'breathhtaking peripety'⁴. Inasmuch as there is little causal preparation for the way events unfold, the *generic* verisimilitude of melodrama tends to be marked by the extent to which the succession and course of events is unmotivated (or undermotivated) from a realist point of view⁵, such preparation and motivation as does exist is always 'insuffi-

cient'. There is an *excess* of effect over cause, of the extraordinary over the ordinary.⁶ Hence the emergence of terms like Fate, Chance and Destiny. They mark a narrative logic irreducible to the conventional forms of social and psychological motivation associated with the nineteenth century novel and naturalist drama. They also mark a *power* over the lives of the protagonists.

This power is shared to some extent by the spectator. It stems from the degree to which narration in melodrama involves the production of discrepancies between the knowledge and point of view of the spectator and the knowledge and points of view of the characters, such that the spectator often *knows more*. Thus in *The Big Parade* (directed by King Vidor, 1925), for example, hero and heroine search frantically for one another amidst the crowded chaos of troops marching off to the front. Having just quarrelled, each searches, unaware that the other is searching too. The spectator is both aware that they are looking for one another and aware that they are unaware. A similar scene occurs towards the end of *Yanks* (directed by John Schlesinger, 1979). The narrative structure of a film like *Letter from an Unknown Woman* (directed by Max Ophüls, 1948) is founded on a similar form of discrepancy in knowledge and point of view. Here the spectator is aware of Lisa's love for Stefan—and aware that he is unaware.

These are particularly poignant films and scenes from films. The foundation of such poignancy in a particular structure of point of view is one of the arguments proposed by the Italian literary critic, Franco Moretti.⁷ Moretti is seeking to account for the ability of certain kinds of written stories to make the reader cry. His thesis is that particularly moving moments in such stories are the product of a structure in which the point of view of one of the characters comes to coincide with the point of view of the reader as established by the narrative. A character's mistaken perception, or lack of knowledge, is rectified in accordance with the reader's prior understanding and judgement. Moretti cites three particularly moving sentences from different stories and elaborates as follows:

... in all three cases, the same procedure has been adopted: the 'moving' sentence modifies the point of view that had directed our reading, organizing its expectations and judgements, in the pages immediately preceding...

*The shift of perspective is sudden, but this does not make it new for the reader. The point of view that is re-established in the 'moving' sentence does retract the one prevailing in the section immediately before, but it does recall a point of view located even further back in the text, and which is in fact, by definition, the primary and unquestionable one, because it depends on the 'neutral' and 'impersonal' judgement of the narrator, not on the 'limited' and 'subjective' ones of the characters. Although Sir Everard is convinced of the opposite, we know right from the opening pages of *Misunderstood* that Humphrey wants his father's affection. The moving sentence dissipates Sir Everard's mistaken perception... by a short circuit that definitively re-establishes the original 'truth'.⁸*

⁶ The issue of the balance between the ordinary and the extraordinary, and the means of motivation of the latter, is a particularly interesting — and constant — feature of the discussion of aesthetics. It is especially prevalent in neo-classical aesthetic theory and in theories of realism. The balance is often conceived in terms of an opposition between the probable and typical, on the one hand, and the particular, historically actual and contingent, on the other. See Genette, *op cit*, and the section on 'The Probable — The Marvellous' in Irene Simon, *Neo-Classical Criticism 1660-1800*, London, Edward Arnold, 1971. The distinction goes back to Aristotle's *Poetics*, in which the probable and/or the convincing are related to verisimilitude.

⁷ Franco Moretti, 'Kindergarten' in *Signs Taken for Wonders*, London, Verso, 1983.

⁸ *ibid*, pp 159-160.

⁹ *ibid.*, p 160.

¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹ *ibid.*, p 162.

However, the effect of poignancy and pathos, while dependent upon this articulation of point of view, also depends upon another factor, its timing:

This mechanism of retraction and re-establishment of points of view has in fact always been familiar to literary theory under the name of 'agnition'. And agnition, in and by itself, is a neutral rhetorical procedure: it can serve just as readily to make the world collapse about Othello as to bring Tom Jones to a perfectly happy ending. What makes it produce a 'moving' effect is not the play of points of view in itself but rather the moment at which it occurs. Agnition is a 'moving' device when it comes too late.⁹

A particular mark of this is the death of one of the characters:

... to express the sense of being 'too late' the easiest course is obviously to prime the agnition for the moment when the character is on the point of dying.¹⁰

Tears ultimately come from this kind of marking of temporal irreversibility across a structure of knowledge and point of view:

... time does not stop, and it does not heed anyone's bidding. Still less does it turn back and allow us to use it differently. This is what the protagonist's death is for: to show that time is irreversible. And this irreversibility is perceived that much more clearly if there are no doubts about the different direction one would like to impose on the course of events.

This is what makes one cry. Tears are always the product of powerlessness. They presuppose two mutually opposed facts: that it is clear how the present state of things should be changed—and that this change is impossible.¹¹

Examples from film melodrama corresponding to each of these points spring readily to mind. The issue of point of view has already been raised, and it is important to stress that it comprises a number of related, but distinct, meanings. It does not just refer to what one might call a moral or ideological opinion or position of judgement. It refers also to a position of knowledge in the sense simply of information, of awareness and unawareness as a function of access to narrative 'facts'. If a father is unaware of his son's true love for him, to use Moretti's example, it may be because he is insensitive, because he lacks 'understanding'. But it may also be because he has had no access to his son's true feelings, because his son has concealed them, has never told him that he loves him. There is a distinction to be made even if in practice these two forms of understanding often overlap. (The father may never have been told how his son feels, but equally, he may never have cared enough to find out.) In the instance from *The Big Parade* mentioned above, point of view and knowledge are of this second kind: the characters simply do not know they are each looking for each other (though the quarrel preceding this scene does establish a degree of insensitivity to the heroine's feelings on the part of the hero).



Looking for love:
top, searching the
troops in *The Big
Parade* (1925), and
below, in *Yanks*
(1979).



In addition, there is the issue of point of view in its technical cinematic sense.¹² In the instance both of *The Big Parade* and of *Yanks*, narrative and character point of view, and the poignancy that stems from the discrepancies between them, are articulated in terms of optical point of view and the eyeline match: the characters are unaware that they are searching for each other because they do not *see* each other. There is a refusal of optical point of view, of a meeting and exchange of looks across an eyeline match. Interestingly, although as Ben Brewster has pointed out, Griffith tends to use point of view and the eyeline match very

¹² See Edward Branigan, 'Formal Permutations of the Point-of-View Shot', *Screen* Autumn 1975, vol 16 no 3, pp 54-64.

¹³ Ben Brewster, 'A Scene at the Movies', *Screen* July-August 1982, vol 23 no 2, pp 4-15.

sparingly, preferring to establish hierarchies of character knowledge and point of view by other means, some of the most poignant moments in his melodramas do involve these devices.¹³ In *Broken Blossoms* (1919), for instance, Cheng Huan's love for Lucy (and her unawareness of his love) is established in a sequence in which he gazes at her through his shop window while she is looking in another direction. And in *Orphans of the Storm* (1922) there is a scene in which Henriette Girard sees her long separated sister in the street from the vantage point of a high window. She shouts to attract her attention. But the sister is blind, and the distance between them so great that it is impossible to gauge where Henriette is. And Henriette cannot get to the street because she is so high up. Here the lack of reciprocal point of view shots and the eyeline match is clearly both motivated and intensified by the sister's blindness.

In addition to the refusal of an exchange of looks across point of view structures and the eyeline match, poignancy can also come from a narrative strategy in which optical point of view and character knowledge are differentiated from one another. In *Only Yesterday* (directed by John M Stahl, 1933), Mary Lane searches the columns of parading soldiers home from the war for the father of her child. Initially, she cannot see him. Then she catches sight of him across the street. She rushes over and touches his arm. He turns round: there is a matching of eyelines, an exchange of looks. But although he *sees* her, he does not *recognise* her. He has forgotten her and their night of love. There is a coincidence of optical point of view, but a marked non-coincidence of character point of view. The film is structured around such moments of coincidence and non-coincidence, as is *Letter from an Unknown Woman*. When Stefan and Lisa meet again at the opera, they exchange looks and Stefan pursues Lisa to the opera foyer, but he does not realise who she is. Lisa knows who he is, but is unaware that he does not recognise her until later, when she goes to his apartment. Every time they meet, in fact, there are discrepancies of knowledge and awareness of various kinds across an insistence of exchanged looks, point of view shots and eyeline matches.

Moretti's thesis about the timing of the coincidence of knowledge and point of view is also well illustrated by *Letter from an Unknown Woman*. Stefan indeed comes to realise who Lisa is and to know of her love too late – her letter has been written on her deathbed. Shots of Lisa from Stefan's point of view recur as Stefan's memories at the moment of his realisation. Points of view in the optical and narrative senses at last coincide – but Lisa is dead. *Imitation of Life* (directed by Douglas Sirk, 1958) and *Some Came Running* (directed by Vincente Minnelli, 1958) provide other examples of films in which pathos is the product of a realisation that comes too late, and in which this is underlined by the death of one of the characters – the one unrecognised or misunderstood by those left to grieve: Annie in the former instance and Ginny in the latter. As Lisa's letter puts it: 'if only you could have *recognised* what was always yours' (my emphasis).

In addition to films like these, though, there do exist poignant and tearful films in which characters do not die, and in which the coin-

cidence of points of view is not too late. To return to *The Big Parade* and *Yanks*, the scenes which I have been discussing end with a coincidence of each of the kinds of point of view I have tried to identify. The characters become aware that they are searching for one another, that they love one another, and this moment of awareness is marked by an exchange of points of view and a meeting of looks across an eyeline match.

Generally, melodramas like *All That Heaven Allows* and *Magnificent Obsession* (directed by Sirk in 1955 and 1954, respectively) end with a coincidence of point of view in the narrative sense. And this coincidence is not (quite) too late. It is true that there is often a degree of qualification in these endings (a mark of loss or potential loss, a *cost*), and in the case of Sirk's films in particular a degree of irony. And there is a particularly interesting pattern to melodramas which end 'happily' and tearfully—like *All That Heaven Allows*, *The Big Parade* and *Seventh Heaven* (directed by Frank Borzage, 1927), in which the cost of the achievement of the coincidence of points of view and the couple's union seems marked in terms of an impairment of masculinity, male castration. At the end of *Seventh Heaven*, Chico has seemingly returned from the dead—but he is blind. Ron Kirby lies paralysed in bed at the end of *All That Heaven Allows*, and at the end of *The Big Parade*, James Apperson eventually finds his lover in France, but by then he has lost a leg in battle. Nevertheless, the coincidence does come in time. It is not too late—the couple are still alive.

This means, I think, not that Moretti's thesis is simply wrong, but that it needs qualification. Time in general and the timing of the coincidence of points of view in particular are indeed crucial—not that the coincidence is always too late (though it may be, of course), but rather that it is always *delayed*. Tears can come whether the coincidence comes too late or just in time, provided there is a delay, and the possibility, therefore, that it *may* come too late. Tears in either case are still 'the product of powerlessness', though not necessarily always because 'it is clear how the present state of affairs should be changed—and that this change is impossible.' What is impossible is not change as such, but the spectator's ability to intervene and make the change. The spectator is powerless not so much before each situation, the state of affairs at any one point in a film, but rather in relation to the course the narrative will take, whether the state of things changes or not. The spectator is in a position of knowledge and power *vis-à-vis* the characters. The spectator knows the facts of the situation, the characters' true feelings, how and why they act, think and feel as they do, a position accorded them by the narrative's hierarchical point of view structure. But the spectator cannot determine the course events will take, a course which, as we have seen, is often markedly 'arbitrary' (full of 'continual surprises, sensational developments'). The lack of spectatorial power is all the greater because a degree of knowledge is available through the structure of points of view: the lack is all the more acute because the characters are even more powerless, even more unaware, and because we, as spectators, are aware of that. Will the characters become aware of one another's feelings, thoughts and

intentions, things of which we, in our position of relative knowledge, are only too well aware. Or if they are mutually aware, will things turn out all right—or will events intervene to separate them in one way or another? We have to wait and see. We are dependent, not on time in the abstract, but on the time of the narrative and its narration. And the longer there is delay, the more we are likely to cry, because the powerlessness of our position will be intensified, whatever the outcome of events, ‘happy’ or ‘sad’, too late or just in time.

So, tears in melodrama come in part from some of the fundamental characteristics of its narratives and modes of narration. A particular place is constructed for the spectator, a place from which, like Lisa (and Stefan), we are led to wish ‘if only’: if only this character realised the other’s worth, if only she or he were aware of the other’s existence, if only they had met in different circumstances in a different time, in a different place, ‘*if only* you could have recognised what was always yours’ (my emphasis). However, these narratives themselves do not fully account for the existence or nature of the wish. They construct a position from which to wish, but not the wish itself. In order to account for the wish we have to turn to the issue of fantasy and seek to identify the kinds of fantasy that melodrama tends to involve.

Melodramas tend to deal in terms of subject matter with desire and its vicissitudes. As a genre marked by emotional hyperbole, by what Peter Brooks has called ‘grandiose emotional states’¹⁴, melodrama involves extremes of polarised emotion: love and hate, joy and despair, and so on. These extremes mark and are marked by the vicissitudes of desire: its coming into existence, its realisation (brief or lasting) or its failure, and in particular the blockages to its fulfilment. The constantly changing and apparently arbitrary course of events articulates and intensifies these vicissitudes, and, in turn, is motivated by them. Blockages, barriers and bars to the fulfilment of desire are constantly introduced as events change course.

These blockages are characterised and motivated in different ways. They may be specified, for instance, in social terms, as the product of family circumstances or the strictures of class and social propriety. As an older and ‘respectable’ widow, Cary Scott feels barred from marrying Ron Kirby in *All That Heaven Allows*, caught between her desire and her social circumstances. As a courtesan, the heroine of *Camille* (directed by George Cukor, 1937) has to renounce her love for the hero. Such blockages may be specified in terms of physical or psychical impairment (as happens to both Cary and Ron at different points in *All That Heaven Allows*). Or they may be specified as the product of Chance, Fate or Destiny. Outside events simply and unexpectedly intervene. War breaks out, or, against all the odds (and the rules of realist motivation), Battling Burrows’ crony in *Broken Blossoms* just happens to be in Cheng Huan’s shop at the moment when Lucy, unaware of his presence, just happens to knock over an item of crockery, causing him to investigate and discover her whereabouts. In practice, of course, these forms of blockage can, and usually do, overlap. War breaks out in *Seventh Heaven*, but

¹⁴ Peter Brooks, *op cit*, p 35.



Injury bars the
fulfilment of desire:
*All That Heaven
Allows* (1955).

Chico goes to the front out of a sense of national duty (he wishes to defend Paris from the Germans). The strictures of social propriety and in particular the obligations and responsibilities of marriage and children that weigh so heavily upon Laura in *Brief Encounter* are intensified by the fact that one of the children just happens to have an accident, and that she and her lover just happen to be seen together by Laura's acquaintances. And so on.

Inasmuch as desire is central to melodrama, so, too, is fantasy. For fantasy, as Elizabeth Cowie has argued, is the site and, in many senses the mode of existence, of desire.¹⁵ Fantasy is the setting of desire, is its 'veritable *mise-en-scène*'¹⁶. But all genres, indeed all fictions, involve fantasy and, therefore, desire. Is there any specificity to the forms of desire and fantasy involved in melodrama?

One answer perhaps would argue that the characteristic form of desire in melodrama is adult, heterosexual desire, and that the aim of its fantasy is the union of an adult, heterosexual couple. This may be prevented, delayed or blocked for the kinds of reasons and in the kinds of ways outlined above. Such an answer would be problematic in that it does not differentiate between *sexuality* and *love*, either as forms of desire (or aims of desire) or as the mode of union of the fantasy. Sexual desire (and its fulfilment) can after all be represented in forms from which love is often absent – in pornography, for instance. In a film like *Broken Blossoms*, it becomes evident that the key to the melodramatic fantasy is not the union of a couple through sexuality, but rather the union of a couple through love. For *Broken Blossoms* involves the representation of a love and the union of a couple to whom sexuality, as such, is a threat. The film constructs sexuality as exclusively male. Female sexuality simply does not exist: Lucy is young, innocent and childlike, her married friend

¹⁵ Elizabeth Cowie, 'Fantasia' *m/f* no 9, 1984, pp 71-105.

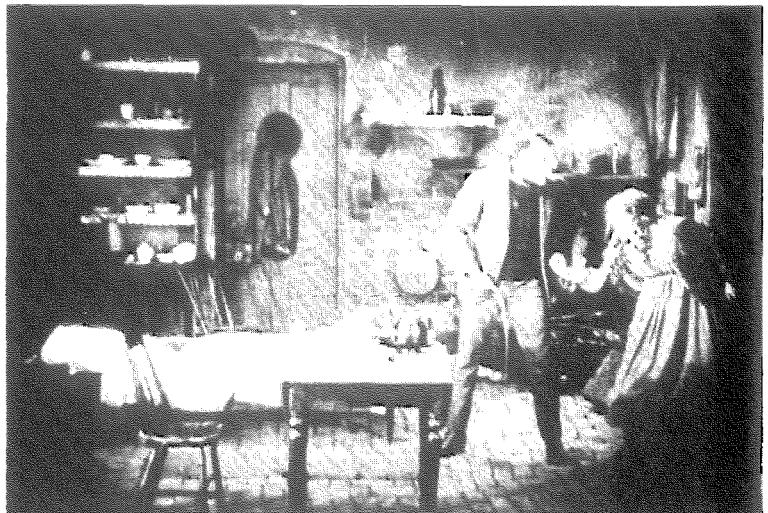
¹⁶ *ibid.*, p 79.

The childlike Lucy
of *Broken Blossoms*
(1919).

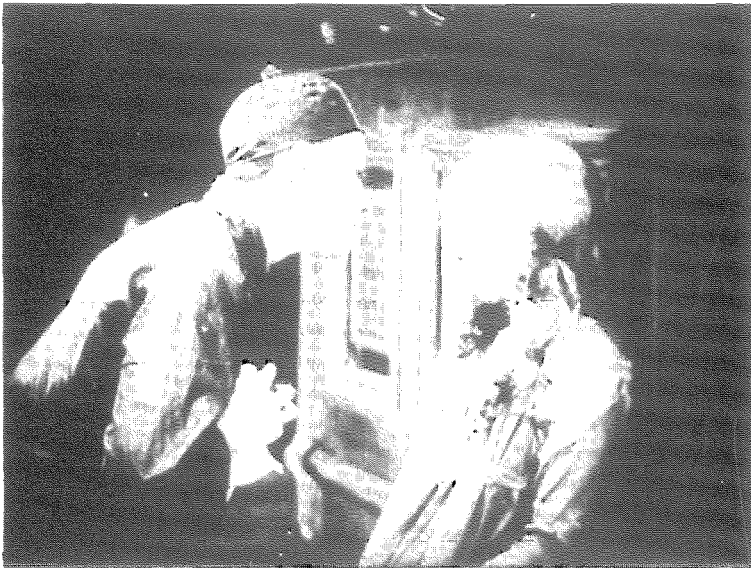


is solely a suffering bearer of children, and the prostitutes who advise her against their trade do so as adjuncts to—and sufferers from—a sexuality which is male. Furthermore, male sexuality is specified exclusively as a form of violent aggression. This is most evident in the characterisation of Battling Burrows, Lucy's father, who is a boxer, and who beats her violently with a whip whose tip can, in a number of shots, be seen dangling between his legs. Lucy finds momentary comfort—and love—from Cheng Huan. The threat to that love comes primarily from outside. But it comes also from the possibility that Cheng Huan's love may be *sexual*. In the bedroom scene, as he lavishes her with clothes, flowers and affection, there occurs a moment at which, in a point of view shot from

Lucy beaten by her
father with his
blatantly phallic
whip.



Lucy's position, he leans in close-up towards the camera, as if to kiss her. At that moment, and at that moment only, he takes on the connotations of aggression and menace that had hitherto characterised her father and Evil Eye, another Chinese. Prior to this moment, Cheng Huan had been characterised as very feminine. In an extraordinary sequence earlier in the film, in which Lucy is caught unawares between two looks, that of Cheng Huan and that of Evil Eye, the former had been explicitly differentiated from the latter on the grounds of the nature of their looks. Cheng Huan is loving, tender and protective. Evil Eye's is leering, menacing and sexual. Here, though, the threatened kiss produces a marking of look and facial expression almost identical to that of Evil Eye. Racial difference is stressed here, too. Cheng Huan is not only *male*, he is *Oriental*. Race and gender both emerge here to mark and re-mark an impossible and menacing otherness that threatens both Lucy and the



Cheng Huan's love for Lucy takes on a sexual threat.

union of the couple. Sexuality involves an irreducible otherness—an other *body*—and this must be repressed in order for the union through love to sustain itself. For the fantasy of the union through love to be sustained, sexuality must either be repressed or sublimated: Cheng Huan then kisses not Lucy's lips, but her hand.¹⁷

It may well be argued that the fantasy articulated in Griffith's film is a particular—and particularly perverse—one. While it may in some senses be extreme, though, it does illustrate the extent to which, in a classic melodrama, a fantasy of love can be differentiated from a fantasy of sex (at least as conventionally understood, i.e. a fantasy involving or understood as involving sexual activity; the supreme mark of this in classical Hollywood melodrama is, of course, the kiss). This is all the more important inasmuch as there are a number of melodramas which centre

¹⁷ For a discussion of the theme of the 'tragic Mulatto', see Thomas Cripps, *From Sambo to Superspade*.

¹⁸ Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, Harmondsworth, Peregrine, 1977, p 186.

¹⁹ *ibid*, p 192.

not on an adult, heterosexual couple, but on other relations, notably that between a mother and child (as in *Stella Dallas* and the second half, certainly, of *Imitation of Life*). And in tear-jerking films beyond the province of melodrama proper, like *E.T.* and *The Yearling*, in part, perhaps, because of a particular ideological conception of childhood, sexuality is never an explicit issue. What is at issue is a relationship of caring and love between two characters (in these instances a boy and an extra-terrestrial and a boy and a young deer).

To Lacan, love is 'fundamentally narcissistic'¹⁸. The 'field of love, that is to say . . . the framework of narcissism . . . is made up of the insertion of the *autoerotisch* in the organized interests of the ego.'¹⁹ The object of desire is the desire of the other; one loves an other in order to be loved, desires an other in order to be desired. Nowhere is this clearer than in Chaplin's films, which although comedies are of course renowned for their pathos. This pathos stems not only from the articulation of a wish to be loved across the relations between the Chaplin character and his heroines, it stems in addition from a marking of this wish in the relationship established between the Chaplin figure and the spectator. For the spectator, the figure is *lovable*, but for many characters in the films he is a disturbance, a nuisance, worthy only of ridicule, rejection or contempt. They have no access to our knowledge and position as spectators. We know he is worthy of love and affection; they, often, do not. Hence the pathos and tears marking the endings of those films in which he is rejected. Perhaps the most tearful of Chaplin's endings occurs in *City Lights* (1931) which involves very 'melodramatic' hierarchies of relative knowledge, perception and awareness, and constantly arbitrary turns in the course of events (most markedly in the sudden reversals of behaviour of the rich man who befriends and welcomes the Little Tramp when drunk and rejects him when sober).

The Little Tramp falls in love with a blind flower seller (her restricted knowledge as to his true identity marked precisely by her blindness). He accumulates enough money to have her sent away for surgery to restore her sight, pretending all the while that he is rich and can easily afford it. We know, of course, that he isn't, that the accumulation of money is difficult and that he is motivated by pity and love. While she is away having her operation, the Little Tramp is jailed. When released, he wanders through the streets looking tired, disconsolate and shabbier than ever. We know that this is unjust and of course feel sorry for him (feel *love* for him). Suddenly, he sees the flower seller, her eyes now restored, through the window of the florist's shop in which she is now working. He gazes at her through the window, the camera placed behind his shoulder (thus a kind of displaced or indirect point of view shot of the kind very familiar in Hollywood narrative films). Cut to inside the shop, the camera now behind *her* shoulder. She sees him and starts to laugh at this absurdly shabby figure looking longingly at her. ('I think I've made a conquest', she laughs.) At this point, the discrepancies between character knowledge and point of view are almost unbearably marked. Potential *mutual* recognition is delayed. The flower seller comes out of



City Lights: the unrecognised tramp gazes at his beloved.

the shop to give the Little Tramp a flower. Their hands touch. At last she recognises him, recognises his touch, and realises who he is. At which point the spectator, already deeply moved, is liable simply to burst into tears. This is due in part to the almost paradigmatically melodramatic point of view structure involved here. But it also happens because the spectator wishes the Chaplin character to be recognised and loved, because the fulfilment of the wish is delayed and because, nevertheless, it eventually comes.

Melodrama is full of characters who wish to be loved, who are worthy of love, and whom the spectator therefore wishes to be loved: Lisa in *Letter from an Unknown Woman*, Donnelly in *The Reckless Moment* (Max Ophuls, 1949), Charlotte Vale in *Now, Voyager* (directed by Irving Rapper, 1942), Mary Lane in *Only Yesterday*, Lucy in *Broken Blossoms*, Ginny in *Some Came Running* (directed by Vincente Minnelli, 1958). But the spectator wishes for more than that. He or she wishes these characters to be loved in order to satisfy his or her *own* wish for the union of the couple. The root of this wish lies in a nostalgic fantasy of childhood characterised by union with the mother: a state of total love, satisfaction, and dyadic fusion.

One can clearly locate particular versions of a wish for union with the mother in the work of directors specialising in melodrama. For Griffith, the sexuality involved in the wish is disavowed, by characterising sexuality as the property of the father (and/or of the racial other). The figure of the mother is central in a film like *Intolerance* (1916), but it is often displaced onto feminised males or childlike and innocent females (the mother's sexuality thus further disavowed), both of whom may be marked as motherly, being capable of love, care, tenderness and, in

²⁰ These remarks on Griffith are based on viewing only a few of his films (most of them features). They should therefore be treated as provisional and to some extent speculative.

²¹ Thomas Elsaesser, 'Vincente Minnelli', in Rick Altman (ed), *The Musical*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul/British Film Institute, 1981.

²² For an outline of the components involved in this fantasy see Sigmund Freud, 'A Special Type of Choice of Object Made by Men', in *On Sexuality*, Harmondsworth, Pelican Freud Library, volume 7, 1977.

particular, acts of 'maternal' protection and self-sacrifice. The union may be figured either in terms of the (non-sexual) heterosexual couple, or – and this is recurrent in Griffith – in terms of a relationship between two sisters.²⁰

As Thomas Elsaesser has argued, the films of Vincente Minnelli are marked by the wish on the part of their protagonists to order the world according to their dreams, desires and visions, to construct the world in their own image.²¹ In his musicals, this wish can be achieved, but in the melodramas, rarely so. In Minnelli's films, the wish for fusion with the mother is thus figured as the wish for a fusion of self and world, a wish which finds its articulation quite explicitly as aesthetic fantasy: the characters who wish are singers and dancers, film producers, film directors, novelists, painters, each seeking obsessively both to merge with and separate themselves from the world through the practice of representation. Interestingly, both the failure *and* the achievement of the wish and its fantasy are marked in terms of symptoms of insanity and mental disturbance. In *The Cobweb* (1955), *Lust for Life* (1956) and *Two Weeks in Another Town* (1962) this marking is explicit. It is certainly implicit in *The Bad and the Beautiful* (1952) and *Some Came Running* (1959), whose protagonists are nothing if not obsessively neurotic. The achievement of the wish courts psychosis and death (as in *Lust for Life*). Its failure produces in Minnelli's melodramas an intense, agonised and often uncontrollable anguish: the characters are permanently and neurotically scarred by a fundamental loss of and separation from the mother, by the dissolution of a union they wish desperately to restore.

A number of Frank Borzage's films, most notably, perhaps, *Seventh Heaven* and *Street Angel* (1928) are marked by a classic male fantasy of union with the mother. The heroine is a 'fallen' woman. She is degraded or tainted in some way, is rescued by the male and comes to attain the status of a madonna in a union of 'spiritual' love: the mother is shorn of her sexuality (the mark of her degradation, the sign of her desire for a rival – the father) and thus restored as the exclusive source and object of love for her son.²²

A scene in *Imitation of Life* articulates one of the major components of the fantasy of union, linking it to the issue and importance of knowledge, point of view, understanding and awareness in melodrama. Annie, a black maid, goes for the second time to see her fair-skinned daughter backstage. This time, though, she will not force her daughter to leave, to give up her job as a showgirl and return home. She will let Sarah Jane do as she wishes. Sarah Jane's room-mate arrives. In order to avoid embarrassment (and possibly jeopardy to Sarah Jane's career), Annie pretends to be her daughter's former nanny. Sarah Jane's anger has dissipated once she realises she will not be exposed and forced to leave. Annie has to go. She and Sarah Jane embrace, Annie to the right of frame, her face obscured, Sarah Jane to the left, her face visible to the spectator. Sarah Jane says 'goodbye' then mouths inaudibly but visibly the word 'Mama', precisely the word Annie would like to but cannot hear. This instance of failed communication, here focused directly on the figure of the mother,

is only one of many such instances in melodrama. Peter Brooks, in his discussion of melodrama in literature and on the stage, discusses the issue of failed or inadequate communication in terms of the importance of gestures (as opposed to words) and in terms of what he calls 'the text of muteness', in which cries and gestures become the only adequate vehicles for the articulation of feelings²³. The cry and the gesture indicate 'a kind of fault or gap in the code, the space that marks its inadequacies to convey a full freight of emotional meaning'.²⁴ Tears very often come in this gap. It is a gap marked not only in the significance of gesture and the inarticulate cry, but also in the non-coincidence of points of view and knowledge discussed earlier, and in addition in the figures of blindness and muteness that occur so often in melodrama, from *Orphans of the Storm* to *Magnificent Obsession*, from *Moonrise* (directed by Frank Borzage, 1949) to *Letter from an Unknown Woman* (where Jean, the servant, the one who knows, precisely cannot speak). One of the reasons instances of this gap can be so moving is that they mark a form of failure of the fantasy of union—a fantasy of oneness, therefore total and effortless communication and mutual understanding. When in *Seventh Heaven* Diane and Chico commune with one another regularly at eleven o'clock, despite and across the barriers of distance and circumstance that separate them physically, their relationship is marked as being of this kind. One of the most moving scenes in the film occurs towards the end. Diane (and the spectator) has for the third time been told that Chico is dead. She cannot believe it. If he *is* dead, then, as she says, their eleven o'clock meetings never happened: they, their union, 'heaven' were all an illusion, a fantasy in the conventional sense of the term.

The fulfilment of the fantasy of union is rare, precarious and often momentary, but tears in melodrama can come from this fulfilment. When in *Seventh Heaven* Chico returns, against all the odds (and all the rules of probability of a realist system of verisimilitude), the film indeed moves its spectator to tears. The union, the eleven o'clock meetings, 'heaven' are affirmed as 'real' after all. However, tears come more often from the destruction of the union or the failure of the fantasy and its wish. One of the most moving and tearful of all scenes in melodrama is the last scene in *Imitation of Life*, the scene of Annie's funeral. It becomes especially poignant (and almost unbearably moving) when Sarah Jane rushes into the street where the funeral procession is taking place and up to Annie's coffin, screaming for her mother. She clings to the coffin, sobbing that she loved her mother, and accusing herself of having killed her, of being responsible for her death. But her mother will never hear the declaration of love that we, as spectators, can hear. It is too late. Sarah Jane is in tears. The spectator is in tears. Whoever is responsible, the mother and *her* love are gone. As in infancy, crying here emerges precisely at the point of realisation of the loss of union of mother and child. It serves to mark and articulate the absence of the mother and the wish for her return, for a state of being prior to this fundamental separation and loss. But separation and loss have always already occurred. Tears are thus the sign of Moretti's powerlessness twice over.

²³ Peter Brooks, *op cit*, pp 56-80.

²⁴ *ibid*, p 67.



Too late: Sarah Jane and Lora at Annie's funeral in *Imitation of Life*.

It is in reality *always* too late.

If this is *simply* the case, though, there are few grounds for an *enjoyment* of melodrama, for the 'pleasure of being touched and giving way to tears.' Melodramas would just be unbearably painful. Where, then, does the enjoyment and the pleasure come from, and how do they figure? I'd like to propose a number of avenues of approach to this question. First, if melodrama is, as a genre, especially concerned with love and desire and is therefore especially marked by certain characteristics of fantasy, pleasure will come from the pleasure of fantasy itself, a pleasure which resides in the process of articulation of a wish rather than in any representation of the attainment of its object: 'The pleasure of fantasy lies in the setting out, not in the having of the object.'²⁵ In any story, pleasure comes primarily from the process of its telling, rather than from the nature of its ending. Moreover, if that ending articulates the fulfilment of a wish, the attainment of the object of desire, any satisfaction that may come will always be accompanied by a sense of loss. For

²⁵ Elizabeth Cowie, *op cit*, p 79.

the attainment and the ending mark the loss of the pleasures of fantasy and wishing themselves, while the provision of an object for the wish can never ultimately satisfy, since the founding object of any wish is always already elsewhere:

²⁶ *ibid*, pp 79-80.

*... the demands of narrative may obscure this, for the typical ending will be a resolution of the problems, the wars, feuds, etc, the achievement of union in marriage of the hero and heroine, etc. Yet inevitably the story will fall prey to diverse diversions, delays, obstacles and other means to postponing the ending. For although we all want the couple to be united, and the obstacles overcome, we don't want the story to end. And marriage is one of the most definitive endings. The pleasure is in the happening and continuing to happen; in how it will come about, and **not** in the moment of **having happened**, when it will fall back into loss, in the past.*²⁶

Thus, if there is fulfilment, a 'happy' ending, it is at the cost of the loss of the story and the fantasy and *their* pleasures. There is a pleasure, clearly, in the representation of a fulfilment, but noticeably, in melodrama at least, insofar as there is something impossible, incredible or fantastic about it. When Diane and Chico are re-united at the end of *Seventh Heaven*, Chico not only seems to have risen from the dead (against all the rules of probability and verisimilitude); in doing so he defies the authority of three major social institutions which have each certified his death: the Army, the Government and the Church. The fantasy is fulfilled, but the fulfilment is precisely implausible, incredible, extraordinary. It can indeed last only as long as the fiction lasts. Crying is both a mark of the fulfilment – at last it has come, at the very end of the story – and its loss – the story and the fulfilment are soon both over. However, if they are over this time, in this particular film, the wish and its fantasy are not themselves lost, destroyed forever; they are shown as capable of fulfilment; they can hence be re-engaged, re-articulated, perhaps finally fulfilled in the next film, the next melodrama (or the next episode of a soap opera).

This last point is applicable too to melodramas with 'unhappy' endings, melodramas which involve the representation of the failure or unattainability of the wish. For an 'unhappy' ending can function as a means of *postponing* rather than *destroying* the possibility of fulfilment of a wish. An 'unhappy' ending may function as a means of satisfying a wish to have the wish unfulfilled – in order that it can be preserved and re-stated rather than abandoned altogether.

In different ways, then, the melodrama with the 'happy' ending and the melodrama with the 'unhappy' ending can engage both the pleasures of fantasy and wishing and provide satisfaction by preserving them. But why the pleasure, specifically, in tears? As indicated above, tears in childhood arise as a consequence of loss, the loss, particularly, of a sense of union with the mother. However, crying isn't simply an articulation of this loss, it is also a demand for its reparation – a demand addressed most commonly to the mother, who thus is situated in fantasy as a figure

capable of fulfilling that demand. Crying, therefore, is not just an expression of pain or displeasure or non-satisfaction. As a demand *for* satisfaction, it is the vehicle of a wish—a fantasy—that satisfaction is possible, that the object can be restored, the loss eradicated. There would be no tears were there no belief that there might be an Other capable of responding to them. Crying is thus fully compatible with—indeed perhaps the fundamental mark of—the kind of paradoxical structure of fantasy, satisfaction and pleasure that melodrama fundamentally involves. Just as a wish (the wish that there be somewhere an attainable object of desire) can be retained through the apparent non-fulfilment of a wish, so tears can mark both the failure of a wish (the loss or non-attainment of the object in this insistence, in this particular film) while articulating a demand for its reparation in terms which imply that such a demand can be answered, that such reparation be possible. Tears, in this sense can be *comforting* in a very fundamental way.

It is worth returning, finally, to Moretti. Although the points he makes about the temporal structure of melodramatic narratives and about crying as a sign of powerlessness have considerable purchase, they must, I think, be modified in the light of the arguments made above. There is indeed an insistence in the *narrative* structure of many melodramas that mutual recognition, union through love, the attainment of the object of desire are impossible—because it is always too late. Tears come in part as a consequence. They mark a powerlessness of the reader or spectator *vis-à-vis* the temporal articulation of this impossibility in the process of the narrative. However, the *fantasy* structure of melodrama can inscribe simultaneously the ultimate possibility of all these things, can allow a retention of the wish, through the very same narrative characteristics. The tears, in their function as demand, inscribe a position of narcissistic *power* in implying an Other who will respond. Point of view and hierarchical structures of relative knowledge are crucial here. They allow a degree of separation-in-identification with the characters and scenario which binds the spectator into the fantasy and generates empathy with the protagonists, while permitting a retention of the fantasy whether or not it is fulfilled by *these* characters in *this* film. It is always too late, yet it might have been possible. This balance, this paradox, is articulated precisely in the last words of Lisa's letter to Stefan. The words 'if only' mark both the *fact* of loss, that it is too late, yet simultaneously the possibility that things might have been different, that the fantasy *could* have been fulfilled, the object of desire indeed attained:

If only you could have recognised what was always yours, could have found what was never lost. If only. . . .

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SEX AND ADDRESS IN 'DYNASTY'

MARK FINCH EXAMINES AN HISTORIC
ENCOUNTER BETWEEN GAY CULTURE
AND MAINSTREAM MELODRAMA

¹ Derek Cohen and Richard Dyer, 'The Politics of Gay Culture' in Gay Left Collective (ed), *Homosexuality, Power and Politics*, London, Alison and Busby, 1980, p 172.

² *ibid*, p 184.

GAY CULTURE MEANS something more specific than it pretends: a discursive system developed out of a metropolitan, white, middle-class and male gay community. Gay culture speaks from and to this position; it describes a socially-defined audience and an attendant cluster of texts. Derek Cohen and Richard Dyer distinguish four key roles for culture in constituting an audience: as identity, knowledge, propaganda, pleasure. Thus culture

*has a role that necessarily precedes any self-conscious political movement. Works of art express, define and mould experience and ideas, and in the process make them visible and available.*¹

In other words, gay culture is the prerequisite of political formation; it admits to our existence, interprets that fact in relation to the rest of the world, and provides us with pleasure in the process. Cohen and Dyer write about traditional and radical gay culture, and the consequent result of their collision. Traditional gay culture is neither necessarily produced by nor addressed to gay people: it is high straight culture or showbiz, and always an identification with the 'feminine': *Madame Butterfly*, Judy Garland and E M Forster. Radical gay culture is clearly allied to the expansion of gay liberation and women's movement, and sets up new terms of difference in, for example, *Word Is Out*, *Fag Rag* and Gay Sweatshop's plays. The overlap has resulted in a new 'gay mainstream culture, operating in neither the alternative modes of the radical gay culture nor the subcultural language of the traditional'². But Cohen and Dyer hesitate to describe, or confuse, the distillation of gay discourse into mainstream culture. Whereas traditional gay culture historically involves a grabbing at elements in straight culture, the latter now self-consciously claws back gay cultural terrain. It is no longer helpful to describe male pin-ups and coffee table books on camp in terms of a dis-

inction between gay and straight culture; what has to be unravelled is the text's exact investment in either social group. What has the incorporation of gay discourse meant for contemporary mainstream texts? The weekly television serial *Dynasty*, 'seen on one hundred networks throughout the free world'³, represents a significant moment in this recuperative strategy, when the (ostensibly) most-watched mass media text becomes the latest addition to British and North American gay culture⁴.

ADDRESS (1): FORM AND GENDER

*It is a well-known fact that **Dynasty** makes more American women happy than any other show on American television. According to the A C Nielson Company, the series is consistently the viewing favourite of women aged from 18 to 54.*⁵

Like their North American counterparts, British women are assumed, in the absence of gendered demographics, to be pleased with *Dynasty*'s role models for real lives: 'Mature women everywhere have at last found a heroine their own age'⁶. It is this representational terrain, allied to the serial's association with soap opera form, which constitutes the popular assumption that *Dynasty* is more attractive to women than men. But single gendered address is complicated by conflicting contextual determinants.

*My husband Richard and I are asked often these days . . . what we think the phenomenal appeal of **Dynasty** is based on We yearned for something we remembered from the movies we grew up with in the forties: stories where the audience pulled for men and women to fall in love and walk off in the sunset holding hands; stories with characters who dreamed of, pursued, and found their romantic ideal There seemed to be a renewed need for romance. Perhaps it had never left but was merely neglected in the necessary reevaluation of more complex times. And so we set out to create the ultimate American fantasy family.*⁷

Producer Esther Shapiro turns the women's picture into a genre for both genders, by asserting her own married status (see also Aaron and Candy Spelling, producers, and Eileen and Robert Pollock, script-writers) and by forgetting the narrative problems which sustained those romantic texts. Shapiro remembers exactly the part that melodramatic continuous serials can never duplicate: the happy end. Certainly, *Dynasty* hinges upon heterosexual romance, centrally through Blake and Krystle; like the byline for the perfume 'Forever Krystle', it is a 'Love That Lives Forever'. But if that love is to live forever, if *Dynasty* is to reach its silver anniversary, there must always be a struggle to maintain that love. Romance fiction survives on this struggle, and Shapiro has picked upon a particularly complex example: 'It's the story of Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* retold with the wicked first wife still alive and

³ Esther Shapiro, *The Authorized Biography of the Carringtons*, London, Comet, 1984.

⁴ Cohen and Dyer also establish the terms of my argument in their emphasis on male gay culture, which has a specificity apart from lesbian culture. As I go on to describe, *Dynasty*'s investment is exclusively in male gay culture. I can find no evidence that *Dynasty* addresses a lesbian audience to the same degree.

⁵ *Glasgow Herald*, December 12, 1984.

⁶ *Daily Mail*, August 25, 1984.

⁷ Esther Shapiro, op cit, p 2.

⁸ *Radio Times*, July 21-27, 1984.

⁹ Alison Light, 'Returning to Manderley: Romance Fiction, Female Sexuality and Class', *Feminist Review* no 16, Summer 1984, p 22.

kicking high and hard'⁸. As Alison Light recalls, *Rebecca* is hardly an innocent text. For the unnamed heroine, Max De Winter's first wife presents, originally, an idea of a successful marriage which has room for female sexual desire, and, finally, the failure of this ideal and denial of a unified self. For Light, *Rebecca* is 'the crime behind the scene of Mills and Boon'⁹. Two aspects of her model unravel *Dynasty*'s investment in gender: an unwillingness to read romance fiction as solidly oppressive, and a psychoanalytic frame which allows her to understand the textual construction of gendered subjectivity – a feminine point of view. The first aspect attends to the ambiguity of *Dynasty*'s response. In the serial form's perpetual postponement of closure, Krystle and Blake will always have problems about their relationship. In the first four series, Krystle left Blake four times, once each series; but if we always expect her to return, Blake is constructed with much less certainty. Linda Evans and John Forsythe previously appeared together in an American sitcom, *Bachelor Father*, the former playing the latter's adolescent niece. In *Dynasty*, Blake's role as father takes narrative and visual precedence over his role as husband; and the inflection is very often monstrous, if not incestuous. Forsythe's performance (Blake's mouth curls sarcastically, he moves abruptly, shouts, and 'stares through' characters) compounds a narrative which has him wilfully excluding his second wife in favour of Alexis, or threatening maniacally to keep the family together. In episode 7 he rapes Krystle when he finds she has been using birth control pills, an event that music and camera position register as traumatic. Of course, Blake's violence has been most pronounced with his son, Steven: they

Magazine advertisement for 'Forever Krystle: The Love That Lives Forever'.



fight each other, physically (episodes 12 and 62) and in court (episodes 13, 63 and 64). In *Dynasty*, the struggle to maintain heterosexual romance and the family is articulated through forms of violence, particularly a *mise-en-scène* and soundtrack that generically codify emotional anguish.

Women's pictures are the only Hollywood texts regularly to explain the world (which becomes the domestic sphere) from an inscribed feminine perspective. Laura Mulvey, arguing from the same position as Light, and against auteurism, describes these melodramas in terms of a model which does not search 'beneath the surface' for authorial irony, but instead finds subversion in the practice of feminine exposition within a masculine cinema: 'Ideological contradiction is the overt main-spring and specific content of melodrama'¹⁰. Henry Fenwick, in his *Radio Times* column, states a preference for *Dynasty*'s 'fragmented storylines, conspiracies and revelations, disappearances, reappearances, and reversals of fortune' compared to the 'stronger narrative thrust... more butch storyline' of *Dallas*¹¹. Are male viewers all occupying feminine subject positions? Address has to be understood—not in content study, like Ellen Seiter's listing of television melodrama's male-centred stories¹²—but in the negotiation between textual subject place and spectatorial social position.

ADDRESS (2): LOOKING AT MEN

Clearly, *Dynasty* is a cross-addressed text. A key location of this confusion is in the construction of desirable male bodies, a confusion which becomes coherent in a male gay context.

If *Dynasty*'s women are Cosmo Girls¹³ one decade on—

*The women of Dynasty would have lives and purposes. They would engage men competitively in business and with equal passion in bed. They too would be strong and goal-orientated.*¹⁴

—the serial's men are *Playgirl* pin-ups, with all the problems of diegetic dimensionality that implies. Mark Jennings is the best example, an opportunity for Alexis to declare how 'cute' he looks in tennis shorts. American television censorship reverses traditions of Hollywood cinema; women cannot be naked, but men can be seen in next to nothing. Of course, there are ways in which television can eroticise women, narratively and through editing, but women are differentiated, principally, in *Dynasty*, by costume. The familiar cinematic devices for eroticising women are used for male characters. Jeff, Dex, Adam, Steven and certain guest stars are shown in states of undress, whereas Blake, his lawyer and majordomo are not; the men available for romantic liaisons with characters are also available for *Dynasty*'s audience. This would seem to be a female audience, because undressed men are mostly introduced in the same shot as a female character (as in episode 86, where Sammy-Jo enters

¹⁰ Laura Mulvey, 'Notes on Sirk and Melodrama', *Movie* no 25, 1977, p 53.

¹¹ *Radio Times*, September 15-21, 1984.

¹² Ellen Seiter, 'Men, Sex and Money in Recent Family Melodramas', *Journal of the University Film and Video Association*, no 35/1, Winter 1983, pp 17-27.

¹³ See Charlotte Brunsdon, 'A Subject for the Seventies', *Screen*, September-October 1982, vol 23 no 3-4, pp 20-29.

¹⁴ Esther Shapiro, op cit, p 3.

¹⁵ See Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen*, Autumn 1975, vol 16 no 3, pp 6-18.

the gymnasium to find Adam there, in shorts), and because Steven's periods of homosexuality find him removed from this strategy, as if his gayness takes him away from the realm of desirable men. But an assumption that men can be constructed as sexual spectacle for women, using the same codes that have transformed women into spectacle for men is a naive one. When Mark steps out of the shower (episode 57), there is a play upon his near-nudity, transformed into total nudity by close-ups which cut off the towel around his waist; this device is 'commented upon' by Alexis' pretence of being nude in his bed, when the camera has shown that the quilt conceals her shoulderless dress. Laura Mulvey's vocabulary of fragmentation and fetishisation¹⁵ is appropriate for describing a visual strategy (white towel/tanned skin, disorientating close-ups of Alexis' pale hand on Mark's back and chest) but not, here, for mapping pleasure. It seems to me that the pleasure for female spectators is in seeing men treated like women, rather than the pleasure of seeing nudity in itself: a textual equality to match representations of strong women.

Male nudity reverses cinema conventions: Mark Jennings faces up to a fur-clad Alexis. (Photo by Jean Fraser)



¹⁶ Laura Mulvey, 'Afterthoughts on "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" inspired by "Duel in the Sun" (King Vidor, 1946)', *Framework* nos 15/16/17, Summer 1981, pp 12-15.

¹⁷ Rather than justify this argument with 'sociological' evidence (like the preponderance of 'sexual objectification' in the male gay community), I would want to point to textual evidence like *Saturday Night Fever* or *American Gigolo*, that is, films which pose the problem from a masculine perspective: the difficulty, for men, of being objectified.

Mulvey's use of pleasure here is psychoanalytically-based; she neither engages with the distinct address of women's genres (though she addresses this in a later article¹⁶), nor allows for extra-textual construction of the spectator, especially the determination of sexuality. Usually, when women are eroticised in a text, lesbian and heterosexual male spectators are most easily accommodated; the former's transgression is blurred by the fit of conspiring in the eroticisation of heroines. For female heterosexual spectators, a non-masculine position is an impossible one; along with gay men, they have to work to convert the hero's actions into spectacle. But women are not trained to objectify bodies as men are¹⁷, which implies that *Dynasty's* codification of men along a *Playgirl/Cosmopolitan* discourse enables a gay erotic gaze at men through the relay of a woman's look.

A further problem with Mulvey's account is whether it is applicable to television at all, a medium which 'engages the look and the glance rather than the gaze'¹⁸. Yet the system of spectacle is something *Dynasty* takes from cinema, even if, in a hierarchy of erotic pleasure, the gay male spectator who occupies a culturally-constituted feminine position is perhaps the only one to make the system work. In the same way, gay discourse 'makes sense' of aspects uncontainable within a dominant reading – like wit and representations of the male body – at the same time as *Dynasty* struggles to recuperate homosexuality.

By 'wit' I do not mean to ascribe a textual self-consciousness to *Dynasty*'s makers; I am interested in the conditions of its manifestation, and how it informs popular readings. Wit is primarily evident in dialogue, but in *Dynasty*, music is of more importance than in other genre serials. A musical narrative is constructed for the events leading to Fallon's car crash (episode 86), mixing elements of a familiar 'love theme', unusual (but easily understood) screeching strings, carousel music (referring back to episode 82), *Dynasty*'s frequent fast-paced dramatic theme, and ending on a repeated echo of her scream, teasingly over a black screen. For *Dynasty*'s regular viewers, this soundtrack makes sense without an accompanying image; together, they amount to a circuit of certainty about what is happening. Music sometimes makes the image ironic. An establishing shot of the mansion, from an unfamiliar angle (west wing in long shot, through trees) is coupled with an instrumental version of Michael Jackson's 'Thriller' – which turns out to be diegetically justified by Sammy-Jo's use of personal hi-fi (episode 85). And Sammy-Jo's seductions, of which there are two in episode 86, are underscored by a parodic jazz theme, as men declare (through lustful expressions and dialogue) their desire for her; that is to say, it's all an act. Dialogue is more frequently witty, but this is most often interpretable as characterisation, contained within conventions of mimetic drama: yet there are moments which sustain an uncertainty about *Dynasty*'s project, especially in a play upon viewer's knowledge of a diegetic history (Alexis often retorts, 'but that's all in the past!', as in episode 82), other serials (especially *Dallas*), and the actors' futures.

An example of the latter unfolded when Pamela Sue Martin left the series. For ten episodes before the season's end we were allowed to speculate on how her character, Fallon, would disappear, almost each one offering a different reason. She becomes engaged to Peter (episode 76) and they plan a long honeymoon. Thirty minutes later, Peter has deserted, and Fallon is knocked down by a drunk driver. She isn't dead though, just paralysed (episode 77). Fallon completely recovers, only to suffer sudden blackouts (episode 79). Her doctor tells her it isn't a brain tumour, there is no danger (episode 81). Happy at last, Fallon accepts Jeff's proposal, but in the midst of her wedding she is seized with another migraine, drives away and collides with a truck (episode 86). That is still not the end: in the following series she is still alive (episode 87), and Jeff interviews someone who gave her a lift after the accident (episode 88); he discovers that she eloped with Peter after all (episode

¹⁸ John Ellis, *Visible Fictions*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982, p.128.

89), only to be killed in a plane crash (episode 90). This playfulness is sealed when the female corpse cannot be positively identified, leaving a way for continued involvement, although Pamela Sue Martin has retired. The text flirts with our knowledge, prolonging the pleasure of speculation beyond the conventions of British soap opera and other melodramas. (Compare the death of Pam's fiancé in *Dallas*, drawn-out by that serial's standards, yet only involving an incurable disease and a plane crash.)

Of course, the play upon Pamela Sue Martin's departure is partly determined by Fallon's immense structural importance as a central character (the exits of Tracy and Kirby, in episodes 85 and 86, are far less elaborate). But it is as if the text takes this opportunity to be witty about conventions of television melodrama. A similar strategy announces the change of actor who plays Steven, and shows how this is constructed by many formal aspects. The play around Fallon prioritises the part of plot development, melodrama's characteristically sudden narrative transformations. Steven's reappearance is primarily invested in visual codes. Before the accident, he is filmed from behind, in silhouette; as the camera moves to a frontal shot, he turns his head away, so we just miss seeing his (new) face (episode 44). This strategy is not to disguise the new actor, but declares the opposite by acknowledging that we are curious to see him. For a further six episodes he is filmed in full-face bandages, and the opening credit sequence refuses to name Jack Coleman (which would mean picturing him). The bandages come off (episode 50) and the camera looks over Steven's shoulder, but cannot see his reflection in the mirror he holds; finally, the camera pulls back and Steven stands to face us. *Dallas* has shown how the replacement of actors in order to continue with the same character can be constructed without explanation and without play. Viewers are not confused, of course, but they are not given any pleasure in the actual change: it is quickly asserted. *Dynasty* allows badinage, articulated textually and in

The pleasure of replacement casting. enter Jack Coleman as the bandaged Steven. (Photo by Jean Fraser)



conjunction with the special conditions of media gossip that the transatlantic time-lag facilitates.

LIBERAL GAY DISCOURSE (1): THE ORDINARY AND INDIVIDUAL HOMOSEXUAL

Dynasty is the site of competing discourses, two of which construct opposed homosexualities; these are the textual articulations of *cámp*, and of the modern gay movement—or liberal gay discourse. Whereas with straight readings of *Dynasty* there is an overwhelming amount of popular documentation, the status of the British gay community allows little access to the same machinery, so that what evidence there is of *Dynasty*'s importance exists primarily in the unrecorded gestures and dialogue of gay men. Within this terrain, there is scant evidence that the liberal discourse has been picked up, which suggests that it is not addressed to gay people at all.

Richard and Esther Shapiro are award-winning writers of 'social issue' television movies for PBS: *Sarah T, Portrait of an Alcoholic* (1975), *Intimate Strangers* and *The Cracker Factory*, about wife-beating and insanity (both 1979). Their liberal project is most clear in statements about *Dynasty*:

*If I had wanted to write a story from the point of view of a homosexual, there is no way that a mass audience would have taken it. But by using one ninth of the show to deal with Steven... over a number of years, I can deal with that thing, and that will become familiar to an American audience, without having to beat everybody over the head and say 'this is socially significant'.*¹⁹

Textually, this ambition translates into a notion of balance, informed by the message of the gay movement to straight America. Specifically, this is the gay movement at its most consumerist and acceptable after Stonewall (1968) but before AIDS (1980), and its message is that we are individuals, just like you.

Blake

Steven, I'm about as Freudian as you could hope for in a capitalistic exploiter of the working classes. When I'm not busy grinding the faces of the poor, I even read a little. I understand about sublimation. I understand how you could try to hide sexual dysfunction behind hostility toward a father. I—I'm even prepared to say that I could find a little homosexual experimentation... acceptable—just as long as you didn't bring it home with you. Don't you see, son, I'm offering you a chance to straighten yourself out?

Steven

Straighten myself out? I'm not sure I know what that means. I'm not sure I could if I wanted to. And I'm not sure I want to.

¹⁹ Esther Shapiro, quoted in *The Sunday Express*, 1984.

Blake (sarcastic)

Of course! I forgot the American Psychiatric Association has decided that it's no longer a disease. That's too bad. I could have endowed a foundation – the Steven Carrington Institute for the Treatment and Study of Faggotry. (angry) Now if you'll excuse me, I've got to go and get married.

This exchange, from episode 2, establishes some of the signifiers of the liberal discourse: the invocation of psychoanalysis, Steven's tentative assertiveness, the dissemination of 'facts' about homosexuality (it's not a disease). Conversely, the liberal project is upset by the suggestion, however parodic, of a political base to prejudice, and by Blake's sudden change of mood. I want first to expand upon the construction of liberal gay discourse, and then show how it suffers under the weight of contradiction.

One key way in which the text constructs balance is through dialogue. If someone (usually Blake or Sammy-Jo) says 'faggot', someone else in the same episode will say something tolerant (exceptionally, in the above example, Blake says both). Liberal gay discourse is maintained by opposition to these illiberal characters, rather than by residing in a single fixed source. Andrew can say 'There is no evidence that a child raised by a gay will turn out gay himself' (episode 62), not because this is his conventional position but because he is saying it to Blake, the consistent face of homophobia. Other non-regular characters who represent (what the text declares to be) anti-gayness are undermined by *mise-en-scène* or performance: the social worker who testifies in court that all homosexuals are 'antagonistic and over-emotional' (episode 63) is played by – in *Dynasty*'s terms – a physically unattractive woman. The notation of Blake's homophobia, though, is particularly complex, since he also has to be a credibly charismatic man. At the gay parenting trial (episode 63 and 64) he continually loses his temper and attacks a reporter; yet by episode 69 he has been sufficiently recovered by the text so that his proposal of remarriage will seem irresistible to Krystle.

The point is that what *Dynasty* finds unlikeable is prejudice, not Blake Carrington. With regard to 'social issues' the text constructs two sides, and shows both. In episode 12, Blake is depicted as the drunken master of an old dark house – two uncommon exterior shots coupled with ominous music establish that he is up (light on) late at night. But we have been prepared for this by scenes which illustrate his frustration at his failing marriage. So when he discovers that Steven is entertaining Ted in his bedroom, his anger is justified as 'the last straw'. Through parallel editing, the text offers both sides of what ends in murder. Travelling shots from Blake's point of view are coupled with dialogue which explains that Steven is saying goodbye to Ted, as Krystle has just done to Matthew (previous scene), a sad moment affirmed by a repeated musical theme. Blake's view of the embracing men is understandable, but mistaken. But so is Steven when he cries 'murder'. For the fight, the camera position keeps rapidly returning to the doorway, where Fallon,

who is the only one to see what actually happens, stands; finally, we share her view of the incident. Thus, soap opera's subject position, 'a sort of ideal mother... who possesses greater wisdom than all her children'²⁰, becomes one of an ideal juror. 'Do you consider yourself a prejudiced man, Mr Carrington?' asks the defence lawyer (episode 63); prejudice is on trial, not homosexuality or homophobia (a specific form of prejudice). There is an insistence on free speech ('Opinions should be heard') set against the problem of human rights ('I won't change the way I live or my beliefs just to make life easier for Blake Carrington'). Therefore the hearing can only be concluded by Steven's sudden marriage (episode 65), an evasion of the issue of gay parenting which proclaims that the issue never was gay parenting.

The text has greater problems with the appearance of Steven, a central signifier of liberal gay discourse. He is what the gay movement in North America argues gay men are like, and the sort of media representation the movement wishes for. He stands as a realist strategy to avoid stereotyping, but exactly because *Dynasty's* form is melodrama and because of the cultural centrality of 'types'²¹, this strategy is confounded at almost every stage. According to *The Authorized Biography of the Carringtons*, Steven is 'a study in contradictions'²². Steven may conform to the serial's criteria of male attractiveness, but his association with literature and opera – his biography trails references to Ben Jonson, Emily Dickinson, Winston Churchill; his first love token to Claudia is a book; he quotes Robert Louis Stevenson at his wedding (episode 65); he remembers Pavarotti's 'nine high Cs' at the Metropolitan Opera (episode 2) – ties in, however faintly, with a tradition of homosexual aesthetes. Traditional gay culture's equation of the aesthetic with the feminine is also signalled by location and music: Ted and Steven go to a French restaurant, the soundtrack exploits the classical connotations of slow, 'melancholy' violins. Physiognomically, Al Corley contained this melancholy in features best described as 'brooding' (heavy brow, deep-set eyes, protruding lips); he played the part with his head down, and sometimes stammered. Similarly, Steven's past is used to explain his homosexuality; in court (episode 63), Alexis exclaims,

Blake banished me from my own children! He deprived them of my own guidance, depriving them of everything a mother should give....

At which point, Blake contests:

Guidance! It was your guidance that did it! You had seven years to turn [Steven] into what he is. I've been fighting to make him into a man ever since!

Constant remarks that Steven is Alexis' favourite child sometimes amount to an incestuous competition with his romantic partners; in episode 66, Alexis phones Steven on his wedding night and has him check her apartment for intruders. A psychoanalytic explanation is thus proposed.

²⁰ Tania Modleski, *Loving With a Vengeance*, Connecticut, Shoe String Press, 1982, p 92.

²¹ See Richard Dyer (ed), *Gays and Film*, London, British Film Institute, 1977, pp 27-39.

²² Esther Shapiro, *The Authorized Biography of the Carringtons*, op cit, p 73.

The prolongation of revealing Steven's new face is determined by its importance as the erasure of Al Corley's melancholy features and the substitution of Jack Coleman's far less troubled physiognomy. But this coup for liberal discourse's avoidance of stereotyping is sabotaged by the problem of how to involve Steven in stories that do not comment upon his sexuality. At the moment of recuperating homosexuality within the family, *Dynasty's* generic requirement – that individuals are characterised by their transgression, like Fallon's promiscuity or Claudia's neurotic obsession, which become the sites for narrative problems – means that homosexuality will always be disruptive to the family's happiness and solidarity.

LIBERAL GAY DISCOURSE (2): GOING OFF BALANCE

The most recuperable part of the gay movement's message is that gay people are individuals who happen to be gay. When Steven forces his family to say out loud 'Steven is gay' (episode 34), the text is complexly acknowledging a personal issue that has to be defined socially. *Dynasty's* liberal discourse is complicated by signifiers of a socially and politically defined homosexuality.

In episode 2, Steven and Claudia have individual liberationist speeches which disrupt (through pace and duration) preparations for Blake and Krystle's wedding. As representatives for what in *Dynasty's* liberal frame are two easily elided discourses, the women's movement and gay movement, Claudia and Steven are perfect romantic partners. Claudia faces her husband with her sexual dissatisfaction ('What I'm trying to say is that women have sexual fantasies too'); Steven's confession of gayness is equally signalled as courageous, through performance and camera distance. This political alliance is heightened by Steven's accusations that oil companies like his father's have 'sold America out' by not developing alternative energy resources; 'Bolshevik', his sister jokes. Although Steven has lost this leftist inflection by *Dynasty's* third series, in which he works as a controlling executive at rival Colbyco, episode 58 has Chris, his lawyer, come out as gay: 'Do you want to hear the story of my life? It's the same as yours.' Chris synopsis his gay romance, sham marriage, divorce and loneliness 'in the closet'; 'Are you surprised?' Steven answers for the viewer: 'I don't know . . . I don't look for these things', but his astonished smile suggests he has been taken by surprise. Similarly, a man appears from out of a crowd in a New York bar and reminds Steven that they were college friends, flirtatiously proposing a dinner date (episode 85). *Dynasty's* gay characters suggest a shared history and anonymity.

Steven's surprise on both meetings is partly the celebration of a liberal discourse which has, by repressing stereotypes, caught us off guard. At the same time, the text problematises the iconography of homosexuality. *Dynasty* foregrounds television's censorial inability to depict gay intimacy within realist codes by showing, melodramatically, how

Steven's gayness is defined by a heterosexual gaze. Any display of affection is seized upon and translated into violence from other (straight) characters. Ted touches Steven's hand in a restaurant and is seen by a co-worker who later starts a fight (episode 5). Blake finds Chris in Steven's apartment and assumes they are lovers, initiating an argument (episode 62). Claudia, from a doorway, sees Luke adjusting Steven's tie and assumes they have made love (episode 94), causing her to sleep with another man. The diegetic spectator is wrong in assuming that Steven is sexually involved with these men. Chris insists that Steven tell his father that they are just friends (episode 63), but Steven will not do so 'on principle'. His implication is that this—Blake's misinterpretation and consequent custody trial—is a test case for all gay people. The catalogue of abrasions to liberal gay discourse suggest opposition to the concept that homosexuality is a personal issue, and opens up an area for gay address—not just in considering how we are identified by straight society, but in asking how we can be banished. This is central to a social group aware of its capacity for self-effacement.

Steven	You know what Oscar Wilde said, 'Work is the curse of the drinking classes'.
Jeff (laughs)	Clever man, Oscar Wilde. Shame he was a homosexual.
Steven	Yeah, kind of makes you long for the good old days when they used to burn them at the stake.
Jeff	You know, I think that's a little rough, Steven – I mean, even for a joke.
Steven (intense)	Oh, you mean 'Gay is Good'? 'Give a Cheer for a Queer'?
Jeff	No, I mean different strokes for different folks.
Steven	But you wouldn't want your brother to marry one?

When Steven moves from duplicity (episode 2) to fierce declaration (episode 34), the text attempts to extinguish his 'gay voice' by sending him to Singapore, or marrying him to Sammy-Jo and Claudia. Ted's death, Steven's facial reconstruction and Chris' inexplicable disappearance foreground the problem of erasing homosexuality from the text. Peter Buckman argues that, when dealing with 'social issues', continuous serials have the virtue of duration²³; *Dynasty* has, at the time of writing, had 84 episodes in which to discourse homosexuality, compared to a film melodrama like *Making Love* (directed by Arthur Hiller, 1982) or *Lianna* (directed by John Sayles, 1982). This is not to collapse into Shapiro's claim about using 'one ninth of the show', but to argue that in

²³ Peter Buckman, *All for Love*, London, Secker and Warburg, 1984, p 69.

the other eight ninths, when *Dynasty* does not wish to deal with homosexuality and instead passes for straight, gaps and evasions in liberal discourse constitute an enquiry into the conditions of textual acceptance. This is complex enough to shore up a gay address also facilitated by representational problems about the male body; however, camp circulates as a second gay discourse, and has a more successful investment in a male gay audience.

CAMP DISCOURSE (1): CULTURAL CONTEXTS

Introducing *Dynasty*'s third season, *Radio Times* refers to 'dramatic death-dodging and dynamic derring-do'²⁴; at the same time, the voice-over announcement before *Dynasty* prepares us for something less than serious, actually using the term 'camp' before episode 87. But British newspaper reviews noted *Dynasty*'s camp long before this, with the entrance of Joan Collins in episode 14. The *Guardian*, *Observer* and *Times* particularly use the serial to assert critical superiority, inflected differently from the tabloid papers' 'so funny, it's awful'. A two-paragraph review in *The Observer*²⁵ name-drops Wagner, Strauss, Jean Harlow, Lady Bracknell and Handel. *Dynasty* is employed to signal the reviewer's willingness to camp; this is a class-based discourse, an aspect often disregarded in attempts to define camp. The *Mirror* would never call *Dynasty* camp. The *Observer*'s reviewer also shows how camp is only a game, the end result of Susan Sontag's intellectual reclamation²⁶ and the mainstreaming of camp in texts like *The Rocky Horror Show* (1972) and *Hi-De-Hi* (1980). Two recent examinations of camp are marketed as chic gift books²⁷. Today, 'camp is not necessarily homosexual. Anyone or anything can be camp. But it takes one to know one.'²⁸ And this is camp's problematic: neither a consistent theoretical perspective, nor a certain group of artifacts.

Arguments for camp's subversiveness, specifically in questioning culturally-constituted gender roles, are themselves questionable:

*Being essentially a mere play with given conventional signs, camp simply replaces the signs of 'masculinity' with a parody of the signs of 'femininity' and reinforces existing social definitions of both categories.*²⁹

Furthermore, the subversive argument is formalist in that it assumes a fixed relation between camp and gay culture, disregarding the historical specificity of that relation. When Richard Dyer defines camp as

*a characteristically gay way of handling the values, images and products of the dominant culture through irony, exaggeration, trivialisation, theatricalisation, and an ambivalent making fun of and out of the serious and respectable*³⁰

he is actually describing pre-gay movement culture. Camp becomes

²⁴ *Radio Times*, April 4-11, 1984.

²⁵ *The Observer*, February 24, 1985.

²⁶ Susan Sontag, 'Notes on Camp', *Against Interpretation*, New York, Dell, 1967, pp 292ff.

²⁷ Mark Booth, *Camp*, London, Quartet, 1983, and Philip Core, *Camp: The Lie That Tells the Truth*, London, Plexus, 1984.

²⁸ Philip Core, *ibid*, p 7.

²⁹ Andrew Britton, 'For Interpretation: Notes Against Camp', *Gay Left* no 7, 1978, pp 11-14.

³⁰ Richard Dyer, 'Judy Garland and Gay Men', in Richard Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies*, London, British Film Institute/Macmillan (forthcoming).

important when it speaks to that historical experience. Bruce Boone³¹, for example, shows how Frank O'Hara's poetry uses camp discourse to oppose language colonised by liberal intellectuals, invested in an address to readers familiar with 1960s urban gay slang. Similarly if camp is considered subversive in *Dynasty*, it is to the extent that it displaces liberal gay discourse as the site for gay address; central in this operation is Joan Collins/Alexis, who—at specific instances—signifies a different level of enunciation from other figures in the text.

Dynasty's camp is most evident in conversation within the gay community, or in the paraphernalia of the community's bastions, gay clubs—particularly, in Britain, between June and December 1984³². The Hippodrome Club (gay for one night each week) held a *Dallas* and *Dynasty* Ball on July 16, 1984, with over sixty look-alike contestants, mostly dressed as Alexis. The same club had been screening scenes from the two serials, giant-size, above the dance floor, since early June. When Krystle and Alexis fought in the lily-pond (episode 58), this was immediately and frequently screened in Heaven, 'Europe's largest gay discotheque'. Norma Lewis' Hi-Energy single, 'Fight for the Single Family', was accompanied by a video which pixillated and repeated images of the pond battle and studio fight (from episode 29), still screened in both clubs. These venues are pivotal in defining British gay culture: they are predominantly used by salaried, white 18-30 year old men.

In the gay press, the Hippodrome Ball was considered one of 1984's 'highlights'; a disco single was released in November, marketed solely through the club and—like the venue itself—seemingly addressed to gay men who had enjoyed the Ball, while also accessible to a lesbian or straight audience. 'Dyna-Dall', 'a dream of *Dallas* and *Dynasty*', peculiarly conflates the two serials, and largely disregards the particular differences of each; it is most successful in reiterating melodrama's compression, inconsistency and (for the spectator) compulsiveness, in a fast beat, multiple percussion and actual lyrics:

*Dallas and Dynasty, playing on my mind you see,
I'm always thinking of you.*

*Dallas and Dynasty, keep on taking over me,
Don't want to watch but we do....*

*Dallas and Dynasty, you provide the fantasy,
That's why we're so hooked on you.
Characters of different size disappear before my eyes,
And fade right back into view....*

*Is he with she or she with he?
I'm so confused it's hard to see
Just who is living with who.
And as we try to work it out
They change the storyline about,
Now that's not a nice thing to do!*

³¹ Bruce Boone, 'Gay Language as Political Praxis: The Poetry of Frank O'Hara', *Social Text* vol 1 no 1, 1982, pp 59-92.

³² Contemplating the determinants which act upon this lessening of interest would make an interesting aside: I'm not sure that it can be located in actual episodes, but it may have more to do with: (a) the BBC's continued promotion of *Dynasty* through Fenwick's column in *Radio Times* and its now settled place in the schedule—i.e., bringing the serial far more visibly into the mainstream; (b) the British launch of *Dynasty* merchandising, directed, fundamentally, at wealthy married women; (c) the decline in London club attendance and the first wave of media panic about AIDS—i.e., dividing the gay community and eroding opportunities for gay cultural concretisation.

³³ Nolan Miller
interviewed by
Russell Harty, *Harty
Goes to Hollywood*,
BBC2, August 10,
1984.

The song goes on to imagine the excesses of mixing characters from each serial. Of course, Hollywood melodrama – and especially the women's picture – has always been the material of camp. 'Dyna-Dall' only articulates this interest as due to narrative incoherence and improbability. But *Dynasty* references the women's picture, like *The Women* (directed by George Cukor, 1939), through formal signifiers like costume (*Dynasty* designer Nolan Miller is 'in love' with Adrian's gowns for Crawford and MGM³³) and geography (confrontations take place in powder rooms, beauticians', boutiques). Other aspects of *Dynasty*, catalogued under 'excess', amount to 'irony, exaggeration, trivialisation, theatricalisation', which circulate about the figure of Joan Collins/Alexis.

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The camp
appropriation of TV
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CAMP DISCOURSE (2): ALEXIS, THE ENUNCIATOR

Of all *Dynasty*'s regular characters, Alexis is most closely matched by the performer's star persona. There are two key signifiers of this image: Britishness and bitchiness. From her work in the 1950s and '60s

(especially *Land of the Pharaohs* 1955, *The Opposite Sex* 1956, *Seven Thieves* 1960) Collins acquires the connotations of British Beauty, like Diana Dors. Joan Collins is 'our Joanie'³⁴. *Past Imperfect*, her autobiography, and *The Stud* (both 1978) confirm the signifiers of promiscuity and hardness that are deployed in earlier films (again *Land of the Pharaohs* and some of her 1970s horror films). Finally, she is indelibly associated with *The Bitch*, (1979), a film which works to problematise that equation. *Dynasty* plays upon this image:

*I'm the best thing that Dynasty has got. It's because of me that the show became a hit.*³⁵

There are endless signs which work to sustain 'that bitch'³⁶. She need no longer be referred to by name; when Krystle fights back, 'The Bitch is Ditched'³⁷. A more innocuous version of this is the perfume, *Scoundrel* – but Joan is a bitch for refusing to join in *Dynasty*'s merchandising campaign, instead promoting a cheaper fragrance than *Forever Krystle*. Endlessly, the comparison is with Linda Evans, the serial's only other performer to be involved in a kind of fit between role and star image. Good-hearted Linda, has 'inner beauty'³⁸; Joan is hard, exterior. Gay culture responds to this hardness and innuendo: bitch becomes a term of endearment. Bradley and The Boys have recorded a special 'Bitch version' of 'Dyna-Dall': 'Dance, You Evil Witch!'. Collins has played the witch in *Hansel and Gretel* for cable television³⁹, and at Heaven's Christmas party an inverted fairy tale pantomime of insipid heroes and vivacious villains was brought to an end by video excerpts from *Dynasty*. Alexis is not far from a Wicked Witch of the West whose actions are directed against the happy monogamous couple – she originally arrived out of nowhere (a narrative surprise) to avenge her gay son's dead lover (episode 13).

*Underneath it all, she is a woman capable of great love, whose devotion to her children can result in a fierce protectiveness, which is often misinterpreted as cold brutality. Her toughened and guarded facade is merely armor for a core of vulnerability that lies deep within her.*⁴⁰

Shapiro locates a final aspect which conflates role and star, but which works (ostensibly) against signifiers of bitchiness. Collins' daughter was close to death after being hit by a car in 1979:

*'No!' I heard myself scream. 'No, no, no!' ... This was a nightmare. It must be a nightmare. 'Not my baby, not Katy!' I started to scream and thrash about. All my reason went. I became like an animal. I had no control – just unbearable agony and the frustration of being away from our beloved little girl at this dreadful time.*⁴¹

Like many parts of Collins' autobiography, this corresponds precisely with a scene from *Dynasty*. Fallon is hit by a car, and is in hospital, close to death; episode 78 ends, unusually, not with a new revelation of

³⁴ *Daily Star*, June 23, 1983.

³⁵ Joan Collins in *Nine to Five*, July 16, 1984.

³⁶ *Sunday People*, August 27, 1984.

³⁷ *The Sun*, March 14, 1983.

³⁸ *Women's Own*, December 8, 1984.

³⁹ Joan Collins, *Past Imperfect* (revised edition), London, W H Allen, 1984, p 303.

⁴⁰ Esther Shapiro, *The Authorized Biography of the Carringtons*, op cit, p 39.

⁴¹ Joan Collins, *Past Imperfect*, op cit, p 307.

⁴² Rebecca Bailin, 'Feminist Readership, Violence, and *Marnie*', *Film Reader* no 5, 1982, pp 24-36.

⁴³ Joan Collins, *Past Imperfect*, op cit, p 323.

dramatic incident, but on a shot of Alexis' hysterical grief as she proclaims how much she loves Fallon, and the 'unbearable agony' of not being near her (she has been forbidden to see Fallon). *Dynasty* frequently constructs images of Alexis as an anxious mother.

The Alexis/Joan Collins conflation casts her as an outstanding figure. Rebecca Bailin describes how narrative is always enunciated 'by' a cluster of discourses and that, exceptionally, in *Marnie* (1964), one diegetic character becomes associated with the level of (hegemonic, patriarchal) enunciation⁴². Similarly, Alexis' irony can be read as referring outside the diegesis. This is organised around two of Joan Collins' frequent claims: that she is really an actress who has her mind on better things than *Dynasty*, and that it was she who made the serial the success it is.

The close alliance of star and character biography implies that Collins is not acting, but playing out a role familiar to her. 'Men have used women for centuries. So why shouldn't it be our turn now?' she asks Tracy (episode 84), quoting from her autobiography⁴³. And yet, despite the idea that this really is not acting, the way she plays Alexis emphasises performance; she completes her line to Tracy by grandly lighting a cigar. Often, Alexis ends her speeches with a deliberate gesture, like biting into a grape or turning her head away from the character she has been talking to (as in episode 59); these gestures are in excess of the non-naturalist performance melodrama demands. Alexis is at the centre of ambiguity about *Dynasty*'s project, re-cast as her intention: she asks Adam to defend her at the murder trial, and he consequently demands her utter honesty, to which she smilingly inquires (in medium close-up): 'When have I been anything but honest?' (episode 87). Alexis is always plotting. Characters are always reacting to her plots. Whether or not she succeeds, narrative change is brought about—sensationally, in the merger of Colbyco and Denver-Carrington (episodes 50-67) and Blake's bankruptcy (episodes 83-92). Frequently, Alexis is on the telephone to a private detective, discovering what we want to know. (Where is Krystle's first husband? Who was Kirby's mother?) She knows more than other characters. When Mark shouts 'You can't get rid of me', Alexis replies 'Just watch' (episode 84): he is dead in the next scene, although Alexis had nothing to do with it. Her 'knowledge' extends outside the diegesis.

Joan Collins/Alexis' irony is also directed at formal conventions. She is informed of Mark's death and insists, but casually, that it cannot be true: 'I left him only hours ago, and he was very much alive' (episode 84). The joke is that generic and serial conventions have conspired in his death. Equally, Alexis' retort to Dominique's 'Would you say these are the clothes and jewels of a journalist?' (episode 85) is 'Well... anything can be rented nowadays', a joke about *Dynasty*'s expansive wardrobe. Of course, there is a fine distinction between irony within and without the diegesis. Other characters have witty dialogue; it is Collins' persona, performance, camera strategy and reactions of other characters which construct the special meaning of her words and gestures. Alexis of all characters comes closest to direct address; she has more lines to deliver as

soliloquy. Krystle, Claudia and others are placed in reaction shots to her wit, threats and insults; they are shown to smile more often than look threatened or insulted – in admiration of Alexis' audacity, and also of her role.

I am not claiming that Alexis' irony consistently ruptures the diegesis, nor that the only spectator to understand this is a male gay one. But Alexis' construction (role as enunciator) makes sense of the text's wit, claims it for her own, and this is appreciable from a gay subject position. That Alexis is often allied to the level of enunciation is asserted by those moments when she is without knowledge. In scene four of episode 86, Alexis dares Kirby to shoot her – 'Go ahead, pull the trigger and watch me die' – calling on our knowledge of conventions which disallow Kirby to do exactly that. Yet scene 21 reverses her and our certainty: Alexis is arrested for murder. The police command to 'cuff the lady' enforces the loss of diegetic control.

CONCLUSION: THE DISCURSIVE BATTLEGROUND

According to Umberto Eco, mass media texts are most often closed texts. Unlike the fixed textual relations concealed by high art's seeming ambiguity, closed texts

*are in fact open to any possible aberrant decoding... They seem to be structured according to an inflexible project. Unfortunately, the only one not to have been 'inflexibly' planned is the reader.*⁴⁴

But Eco does not show how 'aberrant decodings' are facilitated by specific textual strategies; he implies that they are little more than the consequence of perverse readers. Furthermore, Eco's formalism fails to account for the specific investments of mass media texts in both their own media and an inter-textual domain. Janet Wolff finds Eco's model to be entirely relativist: a text can mean whatever the reader wants. Wolff attempts to describe the reader's part in producing meaning without collapsing into relativism:

*The way in which the reader engages with the text and constructs meaning is a function of his or her place in ideology and society... The role of the reader is creative but at the same time situated.*⁴⁵

A media text has to address itself to many different social groups in order to sustain its mass appeal. *Dynasty's* contradictions and complexity allow the reader's 'creativity'. Of course, a male gay reading is constructed within the serial's preferred reading, but this is the discourse of a gay movement which inscribes a liberal heterosexual subject position.

While entertainment is responding to needs that are real, at the same time it

⁴⁴ Umberto Eco, *The Role of the Reader*, London, Indiana University Press, 1979, p 8.

⁴⁵ Janet Wolff, *The Social Production of Art*, London, Macmillan, 1982, p 115.

is also defining and delimiting what constitutes the legitimate needs of people in this society.⁴⁶

The 'legitimate needs' of gay men within gay culture are circulated within an oppositional discourse. Gay culture trains us to be alert to a particular conception of homosexuality which involves signifiers of 'femininity'. 'If there is such a thing as a gay sensibility', argues PF Grubb, '... it is to be found in a preparedness to find certain sign-material relevant for perception-forming processes related to homosexuality'⁴⁷. Aspects of *Dynasty's* excess and compromised address cohere as camp discourse, which, through referencing Hollywood's melodramas/ women's pictures touches on camp's historical alliance with homosexuality. Camp is what the liberal gay discourse/modern gay movement represses. This does not mean that camp is necessarily radical (any potential for subversion depends on the fixing of a contextual moment, and at least the questioning of its class specificity), but that it does enable Joan Collins/Alexis – in a supreme fit between character and star – sometimes to disrupt the diegesis (by plotting, joking, 'acting') and thus usurp the liberal discourse. The latter is itself insecure in that its notion of balance, avoidance of stereotyping, and affirmation of the individual is splintered by recognition that gayness is a political, collective issue; that definitions of homosexuality must be social; and that gayness keeps returning as potential disruption to the bourgeois family. In other words, when the text wants to pass for straight – turn its balancing act into a vanishing trick – camp discourse, associated with a different level of enunciation, draws out 'tell-tale' gaps and ruptures, just as if (and this was one of the sights at the Hippodrome's *Dallas* and *Dynasty* Ball) Steven Carrington, still in bandages and a dressing gown, had donned a tiara and drop ear-rings.

⁴⁶ Richard Dyer, 'Entertainment and Utopia', *Movie* no 24, 1976, p 7.

⁴⁷ P F Grubb, 'You Got It from All Those Books: A Study in Gay Reading', paper delivered at Gay Studies Conference, Amsterdam, 1982.

Mark Finch's guide to Channel 4's 1986 gay cinema season, *In the Pink*, is available for £1.50 in cheque or postal order payable to Channel 4 Television from: In the Pink, PO Box 4000, London W3 6XJ.

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HEAVY BREATHING IN SHROPSHIRE

SUSAN BOYD-BOWMAN CONSIDERS
THE RE-RELEASE OF 'GONE TO EARTH'

'THE YOUNG WOMAN called Hazel is portrayed, and is intended to be portrayed, as a creature predestined to suffer, and, as she herself discerned, doomed to a tragic end.' The speaker is a High Court judge giving a decision in a 1950 law-suit taken out by producer David O Selznick against Alexander Korda over whether their jointly presented adaptation of *Gone to Earth* had remained faithful to Mary Webb's novel about a primitive Shropshire girl torn between love for a minister and desire for a squire. Selznick had argued that the film's co-writers and directors, Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, had reduced the complexity of the literary characters, and made the protagonist suffer a more arbitrary fate than the novel implied. He lost the case, but had a revenge of sorts by getting an American director to re-cut the film and shoot some new scenes, and released the film, which starred his fiancée Jennifer Jones, in North America under the title *The Wild Heart*.

Gone to Earth is one of two melodramas made by Powell and Pressburger from novels by women. Unlike the other, *Black Narcissus*, which

has enjoyed a controversial reputation as epitomising the baroque Archers¹ style, it has been little known and long unavailable. The restoration of the Technicolor nitrate print by the National Film Archive, and its re-release this winter coincides with the latest phase of the Powell and Pressburger revival: the publication in October of the first volume of Powell's autobiography², and the transmission of a profile of him on London Weekend Television's *South Bank Show*. Following on the heels of Ian Christie's sumptuous *Arrows of Desire*³, and the theatrical and television exhibition of *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* and *Black Narcissus*, we may perhaps conclude that the reputation of the Archers has soared to a zenith to match the critical nadir to which it sank in the '50s. Raymond Durnat's radical revaluation of their work is a symptom of that shift.

Concurrently there has been much feminist writing on '50s Hollywood melodrama as potentially subversive of patriarchy. But to my knowledge, that (often auteurist) approach to purported progressivism⁴, which, for example, has claimed Douglas Sirk's melodramas as 'rebel texts', has never been applied to British quality melodrama, though Pam Cook has written on the more popular Gainsborough cycle.⁵ Can *Gone to Earth* and *Black Narcissus* be said to 'make a spectacle of ideology', and if so, what is that ideology? Is it peculiar to Powell and Pressburger's romantic pessimism or more expressive of a British ironic inflection of the genre? It is these questions I would like to address here, with reference to writing on American melodrama as a progressive genre and to Steve Neale's piece on 'Melodrama and Tears' elsewhere in this issue. I would also like to provide some production history which bears on the context of those two films' reception.

Apart from its location within a relatively marginalised genre within the Powell/Pressburger canon, *Gone to Earth* is interesting because of its narrative similarities to the 1946 melodrama *Duel in the Sun*, a Selznick production in which Jennifer Jones also played a motherless gypsy who must choose between a good man and a bad man. This film occasioned Laura Mulvey's afterthoughts on visual pleasure and narrative cinema⁶, in which she considered questions of identification which centre on the heroine's crisis of sexual identity, 'torn between the deep blue sea of passive femininity and the devil of regressive masculinity'. Both the Powell and Pressburger melodramas under discussion here (to which could be added the earlier *I Know Where I'm Going*) pose the question 'what does *she* want?'; both narrativise a dualism within female desire by splitting the hero function. In *Gone to Earth* the child-of-nature Hazel must choose between love and passion, and her adultery enables her to extend her role of Mother from the natural world to encompass both men. In *Black Narcissus*, desire oscillates between the claims of past love and current religious faith, as well as two male objects of desire on the hilltop of Mopu (the virile Dean and the peacock child, the Young General), but it is Sister Clodagh's alter-ego Ruth who acts out the hysteria of masochistic passion.

¹ The Archers was the joint Powell/Pressburger production company established in 1943. It continued for 13 years. *Gone to Earth* is also credited to London Film Productions and Vanguard Productions.

² Michael Powell, *A Life in the Movies*, London, Heinemann, 1986.

³ Ian Christie, *Arrows of Desire*, London, Waterstone, 1985.

⁴ Barbara Klinger, "'Cinema' Ideology/Criticism" Revisited - The Progressive Text', *Screen* January-February 1984, vol 25 no 1, pp 30-44.

⁵ Pam Cook, 'Melodrama and the Woman's Picture', in Sue Aspinall and Robert Murphy (eds), *Gainsborough Melodrama*, London, British Film Institute, 1983.

⁶ Laura Mulvey, 'Afterthoughts on "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" inspired by "Duel in the Sun" (King Vidor, 1946)', *Framework* nos 15/16/17, Summer 1981, pp 12-15.



Twin figures of masculinity in *Black Narcissus*: the Young General with Kanchi, and right, the Agent Dean with Sister Clodagh.

⁷ Julian Petley, 'The Lost Continent', in Charles Barr (ed), *All Our Yesterdays*, London, British Film Institute, 1986.

⁸ Martin Scorsese, 'Foreword', in Ian Christie, op cit, p 12.

⁹ *ibid*, p 19.

I. 'Images are everything'

As we know, Powell and Pressburger's films were in their day considered to be technically masterful messes. Julian Petley, in his chapter on 'The Lost Continent' in *All Our Yesterdays*⁷ places them as the great subversives of the realist tradition of British cinema: those qualities of fantasy and surrealism for which they were distrusted at the time they were working are precisely those for which they are now celebrated (for example by Neil Jordan, in his Channel 4 *Visions* essay on *Colonel Blimp*). *All Our Yesterdays* was compiled for the recent retrospective of British cinema at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and it has been the approbation of New Hollywood directors like Scorsese and Coppola (both of whom have essayed the melodrama) which has sent Powell's stock sky-rocketing on the authorship market. In his introduction to Christie's most recent book, Scorsese writes that 'Michael's and Emeric's films... seem to encompass all the humour and fun of American films, the grace and beauty of Italian films—as well as their hysteria and excess—and yet they remain distinctly British'⁸. Christie warns against the 'new danger of romanticising The Archers's growing critical isolation, of seizing upon their bizarreness as a stick with which to beat the conservative critical establishment, while avoiding an assessment of that very bizarreness'⁹. Again, he points to their stylistic antecedents in the silent French and German cinema, to their contradictory relation with Hollywood (Powell's autobiography is studded with

reflections on the differences between British and American cinema) and to their experimentation in 'synesthesia', Eisenstein's goal of mobilising all the elements of the cinematic spectacle toward a single expressive end.

Powell, whose boyhood passion was for Kipling, had maternal relatives serving the colonial Empire, but his father ran off to live in France after the First World War, and though devoted to his mother, he ended up living there too, like the American artists he later admired. His film career began in 1923 in the Cote d'Azur outpost of MGM under renegade director Reg Ingram, and he worked in the Victorine studios in Nice before coming to direct British quota quickies and getting a job at Denham. There, in 1938, Alexander Korda paired him with Hungarian screen-writer Emeric Pressburger for *The Spy in Black*. Both men were thus influenced by continental aesthetics, and their subsequent company logo was inspired by a pastiche from the critic James Agate:

*The arrow was pure gold
But somehow missed the target
But as all Golden trippers know
It's better to miss Naples than hit Margate.*

In the post-war period the target became Hollywood, and both the Technicolor melodramas were aimed at the US market.

II. 'A screaming-and-strangling melodrama'

Durgnat's 1965 assessment of *Black Narcissus*¹⁰ echoed the distaste of reviewers upon its release for 'the theme of frustrated womanhood in what is rarely more than a pseudo-religious atmosphere'¹¹. The film was based on a novel by Rumer Godden, a best-seller of 1939, in which Powell was interested, having been despatched by Korda to Burma in 1937 to research the adaptation of another colonial saga that came to nought. Brian MacFarlane, writing on literary adaptations in *All Our Yesterdays*, comments that 'the Powell-Pressburger films of the period remain obdurately cinematic and non-literary At the time they were criticised for their visual and emotional excesses Further they were liable to confront sexual passion in a very un-British way: Kathleen Byron's nun lusting after David Farrar in *Black Narcissus* has no parallel in '40s cinema.'¹² Julian Petley notes in the same collection the film's 'weird delvings into sexual pathology' and 'Powell's excavations of the frequently seamy, steamy underside of English stiff-upper-lippery, excavations that took him into the distinctly unfashionable, infra-dig, but of course, highly productive, realm of melodrama'¹³. In *Framework*, Michael Walker reads the film as the return of the repressed: the nuns 'carry within them the seeds of their own defeat', with Sister Ruth (Kathleen Byron) representing the unconscious sexual longings of Sister Clodagh (Deborah Kerr). The latter's desire for the stuffy suitor who deserted her are revealed in a series of flashbacks, and summoned to her

¹⁰ Raymond Durgnat, *Movie* no 14, 1965.

¹¹ *Monthly Film Bulletin*, vol 14, 1947, p 60.

¹² Brian MacFarlane, 'A Literary Cinema? British Films and British Novels', in Charles Barr, op cit, pp 132-3.

¹³ Julian Petley, op cit, pp 106-7.

¹⁴ Michael Walker, 'Black Narcissus', *Framework* no 9, Winter 1978/9, pp 9-13.

memory in the harem-turned-nunnery of Mopu by the twinned male figures of desire: the agent Dean (David Farrar, whom Durgnat places in the Forties pantheon of 'magnificent brutes') and the Young General (Sabu). The film, Walker argues, is riddled with sexual symbols, visual and verbal; most viewers will have retained the image of Ruth applying crimson lipstick to her feverish, parched lips, as Clodagh sits opposite, keeping vigil with her candle and Bible. The Bible falls to the floor, and the monstrous Ruth escapes, re-exposing a statue of Shiva in the Christian sanctuary, to hack her way down through the jungle to Dean's compound. His rejection of her ('I don't love *anyone*,' he cries) precipitates her attempt to kill Clodagh in the belfry. The nuns leave Mopu as the rains come, after Clodagh has asked Dean to tend the shrine of the ghost of their unconsummated passion.¹⁴



Twin figures of femininity in *Black Narcissus*: Sister Ruth applies lipstick as Sister Clodagh keeps vigil.

Roy Stafford pursues the film as a colonial narrative, one which uses the mystical Raj setting to criticise the Imperial mission – or rather the failure of British social democracy to achieve a social order which does not repress the sensual. For him, the Eastern fairy-tale and the child-like figures who populate it, are just another exotic setting for Powell and Pressburger's High Tory attack on the liberal English character.¹⁵ Raymond Durgnat's revised opinions in 1984, couched as a polemic against what he sees as the reductiveness of structuralism, take the form of 32 themes plucked out of the film, many of which relate to the oppositions between Orientalism and Western humanism. Others are eclectically psychoanalytic: Kanchi as a woman's sexual self-fantasy ('Isn't Jean Simmons' style influenced by that other child-woman-Jezebel, Jennifer

¹⁵ Roy Stafford, *British Film and Independence in India: A Case Study of Black Narcissus and Bhowani Junction*, unpublished MA thesis, London University Institute of Education, 1985.

Jones as Pearl Chavez' from *Duel in the Sun*?); the relevance of Melanie Klein's work on daughters, mothers and grandmothers (the matriarchy of the Mother Superior in Calcutta, which Clodagh tries to institute at Mopu, is a reincarnation of Mother Ireland, just as the holy man, the Old General, and the Himalayas represent the patriarchal); 'all our old friends: the return of the repressed; the terrible building; Ariel/Caliban, chastity/sexuality, philanthropy/irresponsibility'.¹⁶

To this reader, the theme of narcissism is paramount. The title refers indexically to the perfume worn by the Young General (and purchased at the Army and Navy Stores in London), iconically to the flowers which overrun the garden of the House of Women, and symbolically to the vainglorious wish of Clodagh to achieve a matriarchal order, where people won't 'ask Mr Dean' all the time. Clodagh's fantasy subjugates individual desire to the myth of perfect love. As Steve Neale—who is concerned with the way the narrative structure of melodrama gives the audience a superior knowledge to the characters of the impediments to their fantasies (moving us to tears because we can't do anything to help them)—writes in this issue, 'the key to the melodramatic fantasy is not the union of a couple through sexuality, but rather the union of a couple through love.' This observation seems crucial to a reading of both *Black Narcissus* and *Gone to Earth*, in which the female protagonist is made to choose; we move from a scopophilic look at her, via the fetishisation of the male object of desire, to an identification with her active renunciation of the narcissism of sexual fantasy. *Black Narcissus* comes close to being an Oedipal tragedy; Clodagh 'remembers' who she is, pays for her hubris, and survives to extend a loving hand to Dean. Across the Atlantic, at about the same time, Pearl Chavez is unable to find a femininity in which she and the male world could meet, as Mulvey puts it, 'and it is their terms that make, and finally, break her.'¹⁷

III. 'Heavy breathing in Shropshire'

Gone to Earth (1950) was one of two fantasies made for Korda after *The Small Back Room* (the other was *The Elusive Pimpernel*) and aimed at the US market under his deal with David O Selznick. It is derived from a middlebrow romance, Mary Webb's 1916 Shropshire novel about Hazel Woodus, a Celtic child of nature who hates killing (the War is never referred to) and is obliged to choose between the gentle Nonconformist minister, Marston, and the virile, fox-hunting squire, Reddin. (The preface to the Duckworth edition¹⁸ compares Webb's novels to Hardy's in their allegories of nature/culture, their fatalism, and their indictment of social hypocrisy.) Korda had bought the film rights to Webb's books before World War Two. Producer Selznick (who 'never had the guts to direct a picture himself', according to Powell) proposed *Gone to Earth* as a vehicle for his fiancée Jennifer Jones because he had liked *The Red Shoes*, which became a cult movie in the US.

¹⁶ Raymond Durnat, 'And in Theory: Towards a Superficial Structuralism', *Monthly Film Bulletin* no 609, October 1984, pp 314-6.

¹⁷ Laura Mulvey, op cit, p 15.

¹⁸ Mary Webb, *Gone to Earth*, introduction by Gladys Mary Coles, London, Duckworth, 1978.

¹⁹ Pressburger quipped: 'I suppose they want us to let the fox chase the hounds.' He and Powell resorted to advertising for a master of hounds in the letters pages of the *Times*—and they finally got a volunteer from Wales.

²⁰ Laura Mulvey, 'Melodrama in and out of the Home' in Colin MacCabe (ed), *High Culture/Low Theory*, Manchester University, 1986, p. 86.

Amidst much publicity, it was filmed on location in Much Wenlock, Shropshire by the regular Archers team (Jack Cardiff as cinematographer, Hein Heckroth as designer), with a US language professor standing by to make sure the local dialect would be comprehensible across the Atlantic. There was the customary interference from Selznick, and then the British Field Sports Society boycotted shooting the climactic hunt scene, because they thought the film was anti-blood sports.¹⁹

The most striking thing about *Gone to Earth* is its overcharged use of symbolic codes. From the first hunt sequence, Hazel is identified with her orphaned pet fox (the French title of the film is *La Renarde*) which she cuddles with the phrase 'The world's a big spring trap, and us in it'. Her hearth is a menagerie of wild things tamed. As the self-conscious object of desire ('It's nice to draw men's eyes') she is twice compared to jam; and another motif of milk and blood, and her belief that killing turns one into the other, runs through the *mise-en-scène*, in which there is a strong tension between the natural landscapes and the glen where she lives, on the one hand, and the stylised decor of the squire's lodge—reds and yellows—and the cold colours of the minister's over-stuffed home, on the other. Hazel pores over her mother's chap-book of magic spells; her father is a Celtic harpist (as well as bee-keeper and coffin-maker) and, when Reddin first runs her down with his horse, he tries to identify her by forcing her to reveal who her father is. He takes her home and offers her gowns if she will give herself to him, but his manservant helps her to escape, her secret and virginity intact. Reddin's hoof-beats pursue her until he finds her at a chapel social where she sings, transfixing the congregation on the hillside in a scene worthy of John Ford. Her pantheism is a principle which overrides her sentiments for both men, and leads to her death in an attempt to save Foxy from the hunt.

The second distinctive feature about the film as melodrama is its foregrounding of class and marriage. When Marston asks Hazel if she wants to be married, she replies that her mother said it was 'tears and torment. She said keep yourself to yourself. Eat in company and sleep alone.' Her father is a tyrannical leprechaun, advising Marston to take the stick to her, and willing to sell her to Reddin on the eve of her marriage. Mulvey has written of the early British melodrama as a transitional form, in which liminal themes such as memories of feudal oppression are set in a conservative and nostalgic world²⁰, and this lineage can be found in The Archers' melodramas as much as in D W Griffith's. Courted by her respectable cousin, a shopkeeper who is trying to persuade his customers to buy margarine rather than butter, Hazel is turned out of his house by his mother because she is socially inferior; Edward Marston's mother objects to his wish to marry her 'because she is not of your class'. Virility is related to social hierarchy in the figure of the older squire, who snarls to his rival 'Can't you see she needs a man . . . strong enough to hold her and not by preaching?' and he is himself courted by a lady of the gentry. Marston, conversely, is a Nonconformist minister, not even a vicar (a scene in which he baptises Hazel with full immersion makes this clear)



Overcharged symbolism in *Gone to Earth*: Hazel and her pet fox, at home and in peril.

and clearly lacks authority in his family and community. (The contrasting personas of David Farrar as the squire and Cyril Cusack as the minister underline the iconographic differences between the rivals.)

Marston vows that 'She shall be my mother's daughter and she'll live with me as my little sister until she wants us to live as husband and wife.' The scene in which he tucks her in bed, and then nearly comes back to her room is one of those moments to which Neale's analysis applies (we know if he doesn't act she is going to run to the moor). It is Marston's social revolt which makes him an object worthy of her love: he lets his repressive mother storm off when Hazel returns – 'What are you staring at?' 'The world, Mother' – and this moment of agnition is ratified the next day when the respectable burghers of the parish, who come to force Marston to give up the adulterous woman, are reviled by him: 'You rule this world, you little smug, pot-bellied gods.' Reddin, meanwhile, is infantilised by association with Hazel. She cradles him in her arms, and, wondering about the passions that drove them to their first assignation²¹, asks 'Who cried in Hunter Spinney, tears running down his cheeks like a baby?'

Gone to Earth was generally panned by critics as 'a calamitously bad movie'. Many objected to it on generic grounds (as a 'fugitive from a Lyceum melodrama' it could not be a quality picture, and it opened at the Rialto, rather than the usual Archers venue, the Odeon Leicester Square); others found it a self-indulgent adaptation. One critic found the 'heavy breathing in Shropshire' to be unintentionally funny, a verdict still recorded in Leslie Halliwell's film guide. In fact there are camp overtones in the quality reviews: Gavin Lambert called it kitsch. Dilys Powell thought the problem was with Webb's novel – simply untrans-

²¹ In the film version of the spell the sign that she should go is audible 'faery music' and when she hears it we cut to a shot of her father practising the harp; however there is a still in Christie's book of Reddin making her father play at this crucial juncture. The spell in *The Wild Heart* is different again: the wind will lift her shawl.

latable in filmic terms—though she liked its use of Technicolor for location shooting. I have tried to suggest that landscape (and music) function as part of the feminine discourse in *Gone to Earth* (more so than in *Black Narcissus*, where the Himalayas created in Pinewood are a beautiful but maddening environment). It is the border country which is Hazel's milieu, and this love of Nature which she chooses over the claims of either masculine or feminised culture. William Everson's programme notes for the New York Museum of Modern Art's 1980 Powell/Pressburger retrospective found in 'this maligned masterpiece' the British equivalent of 'Americana', the romanticisation of pre-industrial rural life. In 1950 Powell had replied to the critical drubbing by insisting on his personal connections with the 'heart of England'—his family came from Shropshire—and appealing over the heads of critics: 'What do they know of England who only the West End know?'²²

IV. 'Gypsy Blood'

This was Selznick's first choice for the title of the American version, and aligns the film with his earlier production *Duel in the Sun*. His legal suit against Korda, charging that they had deviated from Webb's novel on six grounds, is interesting in the light of my comparison between British and American melodrama. The gist of Selznick's case was that in the novel Hazel's conflict was between two worthwhile men, whereas in the film version Marston comes across as feeble and Reddin as brutal, and his kinder side is not brought out by Hazel, so there is an apparent motive for her return to her husband, with whom she is made to seem contented, whereas in the novel she could not really settle down with him. In Webb's novel, said Selznick, her death was the only way out of an impossible situation, whereas in the film it seems an unfortunate accident. A High Court Judge read the book, saw the film, and ruled against Selznick, who nonetheless, since he had the rights outside Britain, got Robert Mamoulian to shoot new scenes on matching sets with the principals.

The Wild Heart is thirty minutes shorter than *Gone to Earth*, but startlingly different in many respects, and clearly modelled on *Duel in the Sun* (directed by King Vidor, 1946) in which Pearl's alternative models are a passive, socially respectable femininity associated with the cultured son Jesse (Joseph Cotten) and the regressive tomboyish femininity which ties her to the wayward son Lewton (Gregory Peck). Mulvey:

²² Michael Powell, op cit, pp 523-4.

²³ Laura Mulvey, 'Afterthoughts on "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema"' inspired by "Duel in the Sun" . . .', op cit.

*The film consists of a series of oscillations in her sexual identity, between alternative paths of development, between different desperations . . . Pearl's position in **Duel in the Sun** is similar to that of the female spectator as she temporarily accepts 'masculinisation' in memory of her 'active' phase. Rather than emphasising the success of masculine identification, Pearl brings out its tragedy.*²³

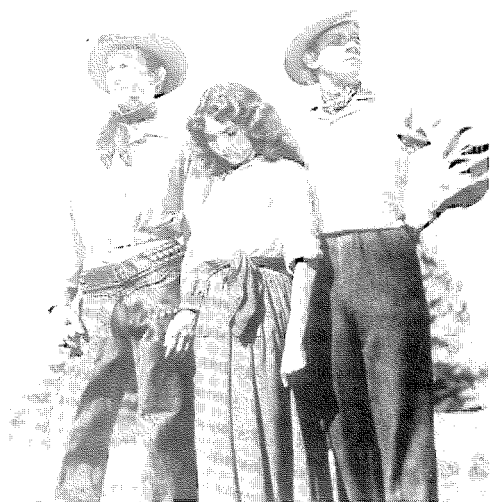
But Mulvey, in her comparison of the 'transvestite' pleasures of the film, downplays the fact that this is a *family* romance, as well as a Western. We have Jesse matched with his tyrannical racist father, the cattle baron Senator (who is prepared to shoot unarmed coolies building the railroad), and Jesse paired with his sweet, long-suffering mother Laurabelle (who was the true love of Pearl's father). The central part of this film, in which Pearl plays no role, is the confrontation between the rancher's men and the railroad, in which Jesse achieves an Oedipal rebellion, and later strikes his brother for seducing Pearl. In *Gone to Earth* there are no parental authority figures against which the search of the heroine for sexual identity is played. Hazel's father is little more than a procurer, willing to consider selling her to Reddin on the eve of her marriage to Marston. The good burghers of Shropshire are moral hypocrites, and the squirearchy are blood-thirsty huntsmen.

Pearl is a fallen woman, who realises 'too late' that Lewton is a scoundrel: when he kills her fiancé and wounds Jesse, she follows him up a mountain path and they shoot each other. Powell had visited the studio when *Duel* was being filmed (Von Sternberg was also in attendance) and detected a sadism in Selznick's treatment of Jones:

*David showed us hundreds of feet showing the poor girl crawling on hands and knees up the most horrible rocky path, dragging a rifle, her hands and knees torn and bleeding. David didn't actually smack his lips over the power which he had over this beautiful girl, tearing herself to pieces for the sake of her – shall we say art? He was too interested in our reactions. I ventured the opinion that she had guts; he nodded with pasha-like detachment towards the screen, and murmured: 'Yeah, . . . she sure took a beating that day.'*²⁴

Powell, whose autobiography does not give comfort to any attempt at a feminist reading of his films, nevertheless made films which do not

²⁴ Michael Powell, 'Mr. Powell Replies', *Picturegoer* 30, December 1950.



Male rivalry for Jennifer Jones: Marston and Reddin in *Gone to Earth* and (right) Lewton and Jesse in *Duel in the Sun*.

aggress the body of the heroine and which offer a subject position which is not socially constructed as feminine, but as tragic. He thinks the ending of *The Red Shoes*, for example, is happy: 'the heroine gets what she wants, it's just that she has to die to do it.' So does Hazel.

The Wild Heart removes the cathartic action of *Gone to Earth*. Hazel's interior drama is played out in long dialogue scenes ('Do you love him? Are you happy with him?' 'I'm a wicked girl, and can never be like your mother.'), and numerous inserts which make her sexual availability, and her lust for Reddin, clear from the outset. The muteness of Powell and Pressburger's film, in which *mise-en-scène* expresses the unconscious, is drowned in moral talk.

For example, there is a prologue, spoken (like *Due*'s) by Joseph Cotten, which superimposes a Gothic mysticism on the melodrama:

This is a tale of pagan cruelty. This landscape between Wales and England is haunted like all borderlands—a country of Roman ruins and crumbling heathen altars where the Black Huntsman rides. Those of gypsy blood still whisper that to look on him is Death. This is the story of Hazel, whose gypsy mother left her with a fear of the Huntsman, a fear born of ignorance that rejected salvation. She feared him helpless and alone.

Reddin is mythologised as this Black Huntsman (and inserted into her mother's book of spells); against this force Hazel has no power, even if she were virtuous, which she is not. The oscillation between the cold and hot *mise-en-scènes*, particularly between her demure parsonage clothes and the lurid gowns given her by Reddin, is lost. In her bedroom, bosom heaving in a Scarlett O'Hara bodice, she broods in front of a sampler telling her that 'God looks after his good little children' and wishes that 'someone would look after the bad ones'. The discourse of class is partly excised, and family is sentimentalised (in one interpolation we see Marston being kind to children). The unconscious import of his vow (to the trees) not to ask anything of her until she wants to be a wife is vitiated by a laboured prayer: 'Thank you for giving me Hazel. I pray that in good time, as she blossoms into womanhood, she may give me the gift of her love,' etc. Reddin's virility is not qualified: he does not spy on her when she tries on a dress and he does not try to buy her from her father. It is not Marston's belated desire for Hazel or Reddin's attack on Foxy that precipitate her rupture with him. Instead we have interpolated, in a hall more reminiscent of Xanadu than Undern: her kneeling to remove his boots after she protests over his shooting some pheasants ('Nice way to greet the good-provider'), a fight over a pet rabbit, a gift of a ruby bracelet ('to show that you are mine'), and his explanation of her unhappiness in terms of a curse on the house, which is haunted 'by people who failed and by weaklings who did not know what they wanted'. When Marston comes to reclaim her, we learn that she is pregnant by Reddin (in this, Selznick's version is closer to the novel), and it is that sin which dooms their life together.

The difference between the two versions is that Hazel suffers more in

Selznick's: the excess of effect over cause, the Fate which drives a melodrama's narrative, is in *The Wild Heart* propelled by a Calvinist predestination which runs counter to the agnosticism of *Gone to Earth*. Selznick's Hazel has even less chance to act out the phallic fantasy of action than did Pearl Chavez. He even re-shot her death: *The Wild Heart* gives us screaming close-ups, and vertiginous shots down the mine shaft, whereas *Gone to Earth* elides the actual fall. The subject position offered in this American re-make of a British melodrama is a masochistic one.

²⁵ Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, Yale University Press, 1976, p 60.

²⁶ Raymond Durnat, *Movie*, op cit.

V. 'Better to hit Naples'

Compared to 1950s Hollywood melodrama, *Black Narcissus* and *Gone to Earth* seem much closer to the nineteenth century stage conception of the form, as a Romantic-Expressionist style which avoids conscious articulation. Peter Brooks in *The Melodramatic Imagination* argues that early melodramas were 'texts of Muteness' in which 'mute gesture is an expressionistic means—precisely the means of melodrama—to render meanings that are ineffable, but none the less operative in the sphere of human ethical relationships.'²⁵ The desires of these two heroines, set as they may be in exotic and nostalgic worlds, are articulated by cinematic codes, particularly Jack Cardiff's Technicolor landscapes in both films and Brian Easdale's Academy Award-winning score for *Gone to Earth*.

Raymond Durnat's 1965 attack on Powell and Pressburger objected to the 'Lyceum streak' in both films, but argued that Powell was too tasteful and not passionate enough (unlike Abel Gance or King Vidor) to indulge in the excess necessary to melodrama. Powell, Durnat complained, was restrained by his country, class and temperament; he 'suspects, undermines, and is embarrassed by emotion'.²⁶ Similarly, the *Daily Express* commented in 1950 that the difference between Hollywood and British films made for the American market was *passion*. But a tragic kind of passion, or rather the awareness of the gap between the fantasy of union and its failure, can be found in Powell and Pressburger's quality melodramas as well as in their art films, expressed across codes other than hysterical performance of the leading actress or thematic explication in the dialogue. As women these two heroines express the futility of narcissistic desires—Hazel, on the threshold of speech, covets pretty clothes, and Clodagh, almost beyond speech, remembers the jewels her family and beloved gave her. What they want is perfect love, in effect union with the Mother: Hazel wants her Mam (a mothering bond enacted in her love for Foxy); Clodagh wants the Mother Church. The neurotic symptoms of the failure of those fusions are projected outside, onto other characters and the natural world. Hazel slips down an impossible hole, Clodagh comes down the mountain on a little pony, and Nature, unmediated by the voice of Joseph Cotten, watches.

I would like to thank Barry Curtis for interviewing Powell and Erich Sargeant for arranging for me to view the films.

THE 'PROBLEM' OF FEMININITY IN THEORIES OF FILM MUSIC

BY CAROL FLINN



Sarah Jane's sultry jazz dance in *Imitation of Life*.

*The art of combining moving pictures with musical tones is still a mysterious art. Describing its values and functions is rather like describing a beautiful woman—there's no way of doing it adequately. But no one should be condemned for trying.*¹

Tony Thomas

TONY THOMAS works out of a long tradition of critics and theorists who have forged links between film music and the feminine; this article examines a few of them. Yet it should be stressed from the start that, contrary to his assertion, part of my own project will be precisely to condemn critics like Thomas for deploying gendered metaphors and descriptions in their efforts to come to terms with the 'problem' of the pleasures and meanings of music, cinema's irrational and theoretically recalcitrant contributor. And while the above passage offers a particularly glaring example of the sexism which frequently characterises these moves, the tendency to align music in general with the feminine circulates extensively across a wide range of critical theory, pervading not only the discourse of male commentators like Thomas but also the work of feminists who find cause to celebrate music's association with the feminine element. Psychoanalytic critics have also established certain theoretical affinities between music, the unconscious, and a feminine, maternal register in their work on subjectivity. As we shall see, the work on music in the cinema maintains this same correspondence, repeatedly, and often compulsively, bringing the feminised metaphor of music into play.

I. Music in Psychoanalytic Theory

Music presents interesting problems for Freud, who rather humorously exemplifies some of the difficulties male theorists have had in handling this object of study. In an oft-quoted and revealing passage from his essay on Michelangelo's *Moses*, he attempts to come to terms with the effect produced by certain aesthetic forms:

*Works of art do exercise a powerful effect on me, especially those of literature and sculpture, less often of painting. This has occasioned me, when I have been contemplating such things, to spend a long time before them trying to apprehend them in my own way, i.e., to explain to myself what their effect is due to. Wherever I cannot do this, as for instance with music, I am almost incapable of obtaining any pleasure. Some rationalistic, or perhaps analytic, turn of mind in me rebels against being moved by a thing without knowing why I am thus affected and what it is that affects me.*²

Fearful of music's pleasures, Freud reduces his discussion to a concern for the intelligible meanings that music might carry.³ In doing so, his

¹ Tony Thomas, *Music for the Movies*, New York, AS Barnes, 1973, p 17.

² Sigmund Freud, 'The Moses of Michelangelo', in *On Creativity and the Unconscious*, (trans J Riviere), New York, Harper and Row, 1958, p 11.

³ For a more extended critique of Freud's neglect of music, see Michel Schneider, 'Mes Oreilles (ces yeux crevés)', *Musique en jeu* no 9, November 1972, pp 45-6. Elisabeth and Patrick Bizouard draw parallels between a number of Freud's analytical concepts and music in their essay 'La psychanalyse: une musique', *Musique en jeu* no 29, November 1977, pp 94-107. For investigations into the relationship between Freud's theory of repetition compulsion and auditory pleasure, see Christiane Rabant-Lacôte, 'L'enfer des musiciens', pp 22-32; Guy Rosolato, 'Répétitions', pp 33-44; and especially Dominique Avron, 'Notes pour introduire une métapsychologie de la musique', pp 102-120, all in *Musique en jeu* no 9. (All translations from the French are by Carol Flinn, unless otherwise specified.)

scheme establishes music as an improper object of study in that it allegedly fails to provide rational or analytic information, and that its effects remain largely unknowable and mysterious. (Note that visually oriented art forms like painting do not raise the same problems for him.) Freud's refusal to address the issue of music finds further support in the fact that he only mentions it three other times in his entire *oeuvre*. At the risk of stating the obvious, it is worth remarking that his unwillingness to theorise music is uncannily similar to his inability to theorise femininity or to answer adequately his question 'What do women want?' – however over-represented his attempts to resolve this latter enigma may have been.

While the feminisation of music operates only implicitly in Freud's work, Claude Lévi-Strauss, who has devoted considerable attention to music in his studies of myth, openly displays an obsession with castration and lack, as the following passages from *The Naked Man* (with its suggestively gendered title) demonstrate. The emphasis is my own:

Music is language without meaning: this being so it is understandable that the listener, who is first and foremost a subject with the gift of speech, should feel himself irresistibly compelled to make up for the absent sense, just as someone who has lost a limb imagines that he still possesses it through the sensations present in the stump.

For Lévi-Strauss, then, music functions at once as a castrated and castrating language, a fascinating feminised object of study to be simultaneously cherished and feared. He goes on:

... if music and mythology are each to be defined as language from which something has been subtracted, both will appear as derivative in relation to language.... Music no doubt... speaks but this can only be because of its negative relation to language.... Music has retained the negative imprint of its formal structure and semiotic function: there would be no music if language had not preceded it and if music did not continue to depend on it.⁴

Like woman, music provides Lévi-Strauss' 'naked man' with a basis for language and other symbolic practices, yet in the end rests outside any discursive or social order, since it is against its alleged meaninglessness and insufficiencies – music's theoretical 'lack' – that standard representational systems acquire meaning and value. Like Freud, Lévi-Strauss places music in strict opposition to knowledge, science, rationality and other 'manly' endeavours in writing that 'music is the supreme mystery for the sciences of man – the one which they always confront and which holds the key to their progress'.⁵ Music becomes the object – static, meaningless, enigmatic and feminine – and scientific inquiry, in a sense, is the masculinised subject that penetrates it.

Recent psychoanalytic critics have continued Lévi-Strauss' exploration into music and the female body it metaphorically inhabits. The

⁴ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Naked Man*, (trans J Cape), New York, Harper and Row, 1981, p 647.

⁵ Quoted in Elisabeth and Patrick Bizouard, *op cit*, p 94.

overall emphasis, however, shifts somewhat from themes of castration and lack to those of reproduction and motherhood, placing these issues within the history of human subjectivity. Didier Anzieu, for example, argues that the first space that defines the subject is acoustic. According to him, 'the baby is tied to its parents [i.e., not merely its mother] by a system of communication that is truly audiophonic'.⁶ This early form of communication, Anzieu goes on to say, is remarkable in its heightened degree of emotional expressivity. He implies that the infant somehow comes into this system of language more naturally (or at least more immediately) than it does to visually encoded information, arguing that the child can distinguish its mother's voice from other voices before it is able to distinguish her visually from others. Thus, subject formation and identification are constituted according to sonorous elements – a theoretically significant departure from the visually oriented terms of Lacan's influential 'mirror phase' account of subject formation.

Other writings of Lacan, of course, do address the special problems posed by words and the voice: indeed, he includes the invocatory drive (the desire to hear) as one of subjectivity's four main sexual drives. Curiously, however, he never directly pursues the idea that music, sounds and rhythm might function as *objets petit a*, partial objects readily fetishised for the elusive plenitude they come to represent for the subject.⁷ Lacan offers the gaze, the penis and excrement as examples of these objects, but the maternal voice could easily be included in this set since, along with the maternal body, it plays such a pivotal role in forming the auditory unconscious. Some psychoanalytic critics have followed this line of thought, referring to the musical process as the means by which the lost maternal object is in fact restored.⁸ Guy Rosolato argues that the association between music and the maternal body establishes itself before birth when the subject is literally immersed in the sounds, rhythms and voices produced by the mother's body. He argues that the pleasures produced by harmony in music in fact respond to the subject's nostalgia for this original fusion, and that music in general continually plays out the imaginary scenario of separation and reunion between the subject and its mother (a scenario, one should add, that is absolutely dependent upon the rigours of tonal music).

Important as it is for psychoanalysts to broach the role sound plays in forming subjectivity, a number of problematic issues nonetheless arise from this approach, as the following passage from Rosolato (in a discussion of metaphoric and metonymic repetition and development in music) suggests:

*The most properly metonymic feature of this restoration (in Klein's sense of the reconstitution of the good object, the maternal body) manifests itself in the relentless pursuit of perfection . . . to most correctly render the work whose musical quality ends in losing itself to the virtuosity of a transcendent etude.*⁹

First – and this is by no means to restrict my criticism to Rosolato – we see that the theorisation of the maternal object as *objet petit a* bestows a

⁶ Quoted in Gérard Blanchard, *Images de la musique de cinéma*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1984, p 95.

⁷ See Denis Vasse, *L'ombilic et la voix: deux enfants en analyse*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1974, who suggests this formulation.

⁸ See, for instance, the work of Anne-Marie Blanchard, as quoted in Gérard Blanchard, *op cit*, pp 101–102, and especially Denis Vasse, *ibid*.

⁹ Guy Rosolato, *op cit*, pp 39–40.

¹⁰ Georg Groddeck, 'Musique et inconscient', as it appears reprinted in *Musique en jeu* no 9, November 1972, pp 3-6.

somewhat mixed privilege upon it. For, while it is certainly crucial for theorists to acknowledge the tremendous psychic importance of the maternal body and voice (particularly in light of its neglect by classic psychoanalysis), the invocation of the maternal term repeatedly obliges it to stand in for a desired regressive condition (note Rosolato's references to self-immersion and loss: 'transcendence'). More importantly, if the maternal is the necessary ingredient to music's imaginary pleasures, the question remains to *whom* does this feminisation of music avail gratification? *Whose* re-immersion with the maternal body does music activate? Might not the subjection of the maternal voice and body to fetishisation be, in the end, a by-product of nostalgic male desire, part of a scenario that is continually re-staging problems of mastery, lack and the loss of plenitude?

A 1927 essay by Georg Groddeck, 'Music and the Unconscious', offers a particularly egregious account of this tendency.¹⁰ After presenting a brief but illuminating etymological investigation into the word 'music', Groddeck goes on to discuss the kind of space that music constructs. For him, music is first and foremost an empty space (again, the allusion to lack) whose enclosure and containment can only be realised through the addition of the markedly phallic and Freudian key signature. Furthermore, the introduction of the male term engenders meaning upon the previously anarchic, feminised space since it provides the centre around which all other tonal material is organised. Ever shrewd, Groddeck goes on to observe that within musical notation, musical space represents itself as a staff of five lines and four spaces. Together, this equals nine—the period of gestation, according to his calculations. Notes, he continues, incredibly enough, are the product, the offspring, of the aforementioned coupling.

Groddeck's preoccupation with the metaphors of reproduction enables him to bestow upon music a sense of extraordinary plenitude. Yet he makes quite clear that this plenitude is activated only by the male term, whose insertion 'rescues' the feminine, musical term from lack and meaninglessness. It would seem, then, that male desire is firmly in control. Furthermore, Groddeck's short narrativisation of musical coupling, with its inexorable conclusion of reproduction, calls to mind the narrativisation of woman in psychoanalytic theory (and, to be sure, in culture at large) where her 'biological destiny' is to serve a childbearing function. It becomes clear, then, that Groddeck's demarcation of music, like the landscaping of the female body, compels each to function as empty discursive spaces waiting to be made meaningful and productive by male desire. The feminine pleasures and plenitude repeatedly aligned with music serve, in the end, to reassure and protect the male subject from the sense of lack that not only defines him but threatens to resurface in the musical text.

It is quite understandable why feminists have been eager to reassess the relationship between music and woman's various theoretical constructs. The impulse behind their work, however, is not so much to repudiate this relationship as it is to reject the scorn and devaluation that

have been traditionally cast upon it. One writer, Michel Chion, calls the realm of sounds and rhythms a potential 'space of liberty' for feminists, a musical space rich in meanings and pleasures, fluid, and opposed to the category of writing, which he labels, significantly, 'rigid'.¹¹ Music (and other non-linguistic sounds like noise and the voice) contrast themselves to the more restricted, 'rigid' domain of language. Hélène Cixous insists upon music's prominent and privileged place within woman's discourse. For her, music and the voice, with their capacity to resonate, operate within a libidinal economy that operates outside patriarchal constraints. Cixous engages the musical metaphor to describe this feminine domain:

*You can't talk about a female sexuality, uniform, homogenous, classifiable into codes. . . . Women's imaginary is inexhaustible, like music, painting, writing, their stream of phantoms is incredible.*¹²

According to this perspective, music's relatively abstract qualities permit a greater play of signification, a greater flexibility of meaning and, as Julia Kristeva argues, a greater mobility of subject positioning. For her, music is

*intonation and rhythm which play only a subordinate role in everyday communication but here constitute the essential element of enunciation and lead us directly to the otherwise silent place of the subject.*¹³

Kristeva considers music to be an important feature of what she calls poetic language, whose practice, she claims, unsettles patriarchal symbolic structures and modes of subject formation. Existing outside dominant representational systems, this polysemic language displays an anarchic energy which, she writes, 'borders on psychosis'. So other to traditional symbolic forms is this language, she says, that 'what has not become law has become poetic'¹⁴, embracing that which either exceeds standard patriarchal inscription or somehow precedes it. And, like Cixous's appeal to the feminine, Kristeva argues that the maternal element is an important component of this process:

*The unsettled and questionable subject of poetic language (for whom the word is never uniquely sign) maintains itself at the cost of re-activating this repressed instinctual maternal element.*¹⁵

It is no accident that for Kristeva, as for countless other theorists concerned with psychoanalysis and subjectivity, music is tied to this maternal – and very somatic – domain which both founds and confounds standard signifying practices. In its so-called failure to produce concrete meanings, in its inability to conduct the listener to fixed references, its irrationality and emotionalism, its very invisibility, music challenges some of dominant representation's most cherished axioms, such as its impulse towards rationalism and the epistemological privilege awarded vision. In contrast to some of the male critics discussed above, feminist writers reclaim and celebrate music's untraditional representational

¹¹ Michel Chion, *La voix au cinéma*, Paris, Editions de l'étoile, 1982, p 10.

¹² Hélène Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa', (trans K and P Cohen) in Elaine Marks and Isabelle deCourtivron (eds), *New French Feminism*, Amherst, Univ of Massachusetts Press, 1980, p 246.

¹³ Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language* (trans T Gora, A Jardine and L Roudiez), New York, Columbia Univ Press, 1980, p 167.

¹⁴ Julia Kristeva, quoted in Alice Jardine, 'Introduction to Julia Kristeva's "Women's Time"', *Signs*, Autumn 1981, p 12.

¹⁵ Julie Kristeva, *Desire in Language*, op cit, p 136.

¹⁶ Teresa deLauretis elaborates this distinction and the stakes in maintaining it for feminists in the chapter 'Semiotics and Experience', in her book *Alice Doesn't*, Bloomington, Indiana Univ Press, 1982.

¹⁷ Roy M Prendergast, *A Neglected Art: A Critical Study of Music in Film*, New York, Norton, 1977.

¹⁸ See especially Rick Altman's Introduction to the *Yale French Studies* Cinema/Sound issue, no 60, 1980, reprinted as 'The Evolution of Sound Technology', in E Weis and J Belton (eds), *Film Sound Theory and Practice*, New York, Columbia Univ Press, 1985 and *Screen* Vol 25 no 3, May-June 1984.

power as a potentially subversive force.

While it is important for feminists to acknowledge music's tie to the feminine in classical accounts and to continue to theorise woman's pleasure as a means of reworking that relationship, problems arise when the traditional claim of music and femininity's ontological, 'natural' link is extended, as is sometimes the case with Cixous. Furthermore, that the notion of music—and with it, woman—so frequently becomes cast in terms of profoundly imaginary pleasures of disordered unsignifiability moves the argument precariously close to utopianism that suggests that woman and music function beyond patriarchal inscription. Certainly both women, as social subjects, and woman, as theoretical construct, are accustomed to inhabiting the margins of patriarchy but by no means can they escape it entirely, nor, if we are concerned with political effects, should they.¹⁶ To theorise that woman can do so is to risk losing her and music to imaginary obscurity, meaninglessness and social ineffectivity.

II. Theories of Music in Film

The feminine metaphor of music permeates various discussions of film music and is arguably responsible for the propensity of critics either to romanticise and fetishise music's role in the cinema or to denounce it for its allegedly seductive pleasures. This has severely impeded serious theorisation of music's general signifying capabilities and of its function in film at large. It also helps to account for the fact that so few scholars have addressed themselves to the topic of film music at all: one critic rightly refers to it as 'a neglected art'.¹⁷

While film music may remain largely overlooked, the last few years have seen a rapid growth in scholarship on film sound in general, leading scholars to challenge the long tradition that conceives of film as a primarily visual medium.¹⁸ The myth of Echo and Narcissus offers an interesting introduction to the issues at stake for scholars in this area. After the death of the visually pre-disposed Narcissus, Echo pines away, enamoured and inconsolable. She refuses food and, like the modern anorexic, eventually fades away. And while the remains of Narcissus assume the form of a lovely flower, Echo leaves behind only the traces of her voice. The myth's gendered demarcation of visual and aural registers at first appears to challenge the models of cinematic identification advanced by Mulvey, Bellour and others, since it establishes man as visual object and renders woman as invisible and serving a primarily auditory function. Yet upon further consideration, it becomes clear that this formulation poses no real alternative to conventional subject-object relations for the image made available to Narcissus is perfect, his eroticism completely self-contained, whereas woman's autonomy is considerably diminished. Echo's alignment with sound is characterised chiefly by her distress and frustration over the fact that whatever articulations she may advance will always rely upon the words of others. Ultimately, then, the dominant models of cinematic identification

remain unchallenged since woman still does not function as an active, enunciating subject. She never really 'speaks'.

Recent film theorists have pondered whether the soundtrack of the classical film ever really speaks either. The assumption here is that its meanings are generally deferred to those of the image track, as in the standard practice of synchronisation. Mary Ann Doane has accounted for this in ideological terms, reinvoking the metaphor of castration to describe the problem: 'the ineffable, intangible quality of sound – its lack of concreteness which is conducive to an ideology of empiricism – requires that it be placed on the side of the emotional or the intuitive'¹⁹, a space, as we have seen, that is routinely drained of the possibility of meaning. Of the soundtrack's constituent parts – dialogue, music and sound effects – music has been particularly bound to and abused by the positivistic paradigm Doane describes. Frequently said to be characterised by its 'raw emotionalism', music in the cinema seems to pose an especially marked threat to the alleged plenitude of the image track, a threat which theorists claim the classical cinema disavows. As Claudia Gorbman has noted, most theorists describe classical image-music relationships in one of two ways: the first claims that music clarifies visual information and runs parallel to the image (as in the case of 'mickey-mousing' action on the image track with carefully measured synchronisation) or by working in counterpoint to it.²⁰ Either way, music is forced to take as its starting point the image. Music, in short, serves to anchor and reinforce – even in counterpoint – the visual meanings of the film. The actual place of film composing in classical film production reaffirms the idea of music's subservience to the image: in standard post-production procedure, the composer receives an already-edited film print, times it, works around its dialogue, and then produces a full-length film score in what is often a matter of weeks. The status of this labour? One critic casually remarks that 'post-production is the least important phase in the Hollywood studio system...'²¹.

Still, the overall inferior status of film music is not merely a function of the soundtrack's ideological devaluation nor its position as an 'afterthought' within standard production procedure. At some level, music itself remains constituted as an improper object of critical inquiry. Even those who have been interested in elevating its status direct their assaults not at the ideological and institutional supports that enforce music's servility but rather at the music itself. Irwin Bazelon writes that film music was an 'illegitimate child', initially borne only to disguise the noise made by early projectors; film music of the 1930s-'50s, he writes, was 'banal' and film music in general can be thought of as 'almost, but not quite, composing'.²² Another writer remarks that studio composers' works were often 'emasculated' by insensitive producers.²³ The legitimacy of film music is repeatedly thrown into question, and it often meets with brusque dismissal. It is not terribly surprising that feminised metaphors frequently accompany music's fall into disrepute.

Music's subservience to the visual aspect of cinema proceeds from the fact that its pleasures and meanings remain defined by and entrenched

¹⁹ Mary Ann Doane, 'Ideology and the Practice of Sound Editing and Mixing', in Teresa deLauretis and Stephen Heath (eds), *The Cinematic Apparatus*, London, Macmillan, 1980, pp 48-49, reprinted in Weis and Belton, op cit.

²⁰ See Claudia Gorbman's unpublished dissertation, *Film Music: Narrative Functions in French Film*, Univ of Washington, 1978.

²¹ Nick Roddick, *A New Deal in Entertainment: Warner Brothers in the 1930's*, London, British Film Institute, 1983, p 59.

²² Irwin Bazelon, *Knowing the Score: Notes on Film Music*, New York, Arco, 1975, p 12, 7, and 12, respectively.

²³ Mark Evans, *Soundtrack: The Music of the Movies*, New York, Hopkinson and Blake, 1975, p 75.

²⁴ Irwin Bazelon, op cit, p 22.

²⁵ Claudia Gorbman, op cit, p 9.

²⁶ Max Steiner, quoted in Roger Manvell and John Huntley, *The Technique of Film Music*, New York, Focal Press, 1957, p 244.

²⁷ G A Lazarou, *Max Steiner and Film Music*, Athens, Greece, Max Steiner Music Society, 1971, p 8.

²⁸ Composer Hans Eisler talks about film music's function as a 'cement' which not only binds the auditor to the film text, but unites one auditor to another as a social group. See *Composing for the Films*, London, Dennis Dobson, Ltd, 1947, especially p 59.

within a scopophiliac, masculinised economy of desire (think how often swelling music plays lackey to the gaze of male characters in romantic dramas). The devalued feminine function assigned to film music essentially duplicates that which we have seen inform psychoanalytic accounts of music in human subjectivity. Music, like woman, might be lacking and insignificant in these accounts, but her negativity bestows considerable plenitude onto the field of male subjectivity and desire. And when this desire itself is found wanting – if, for example, certain scenes are considered unclear or their pace too fast or slow – background music is added to remedy the flaw. As one writer puts it:

*... if the film-makers were unable to fulfill the dramatic requisites of their films – because of oversights, errors in cinematic judgment, or simple lack of talent – the composer could apply his witchcraft technique to soothe the sick film's ailments and, in some cases, completely cure it. In short, by doctoring the dramatic failures of the film, music could save the picture.*²⁴

In this passage, music not only functions to cover lack but to cure it completely. The reference to sorcery reveals the role of gender implied in this process.

In her recent work on film music, Gorbman observes that 'music serves to ward off the displeasure of the uncertainty of meaning,' and, it can be added, the threat of castration.²⁵ Studio composer Max Steiner reinvokes these ideas of lack and compensation in writing that 'the real reason for music is that a piece of film, by its nature, lacks a certain ability to convey emotional overtones...' ²⁶, and his critics, assessing Steiner's early work at RKO where he scored films that were undergoing translation for foreign distribution, claim that his compositions filled in the 'lacunae' of these early sound films.²⁷ Music, in short, functions as a sort of blanket, a suturing cover to render invisible the occasional glimpses we get of patriarchal lack in the cinema – scenes with uncertain visual meanings, mis-paced moments, transitions between scenes that are less than smooth, the lack which in fact structures the apparatus of film technologically.²⁸

Rather than focus on the idea of cinematic lack, traditional male critics have preferred instead to place music within a direct, harmonious relationship to the film project, so much so that music becomes completely enmeshed in an allegedly cinematic totality and romanticised *gestalt* of the artwork from which music cannot be disengaged. (This bias recalls psychoanalytic accounts of the union between the subject and the maternal body that music is claimed to afford.) Indeed, the impulse towards an harmonic and even transcendent synthesis receives historical support if we scrutinise several ways that film-making practice has deployed music. From the beginning of the silent film through the sound films of the early '30s, it was not uncommon for music to accompany a film throughout its entire duration (the premier example of this may be found in Steiner's score for the 1932 *Bird of Paradise*); by the mid-'30s, heavily orchestrated scoring styles with lush, neo-romantic harmonies came into

dominance. The terms of film music as a synthesising, totalising force thus shifted from those dealing with duration to those of instrumentation. Max Steiner writes:

*Pronounced high solo instruments or very low ones, or sharp or strident effects (oboe, piccolo, muted trumpets, screaming violins, xylophone, bells, high clarinets, and muted horns fortissimo) are taboo with me, because we should be able to hear the entire combination of instruments behind the average dialogues.*²⁹

Studio composer Oscar Levant likewise laments the fact that critics seldom appreciate film music as a full, overarching and gratifying totality:

*You never hear any discussion of a score as a whole. Instead, the references are to 'main title' music, 'end title' music, 'montages', 'inserts' [i.e., isolated dramatic flourishes] and so on, with no recognition of the character of the complete score. It is much as if one would discuss a suit in terms of its buttonholes, pleats, basting and lining, without once considering its suitability to the figure it adorned.*³⁰

Although Oscar Levant's debt to Theodor Adorno is by no means apparent in the above passage, it is interesting that a mainstream critic such as Levant and a prominent leftist such as Adorno share the same romantic impulse towards a unifying synthesis, craving the experience of the artwork as a whole. Adorno casts this utopian plenitude historically as the period which preceded industrial capitalism, when good musical pieces were heard by 'expert' listeners in their entirety, before mass production fragmented, commodified and fetishised the works of the musical canon, turning them into hit songs.³¹ Adorno blames advanced industrial capitalism for this splintering of musical wholes. In turn, I would suggest that his own pronouncedly romantic tendency to lament this fragmentation and his appeals made to an earlier plenitude ultimately remain nearly as bankrupt as the fetishising system of capitalist consumption—and listening—he critiques. Adorno's assertions, like Steiner's and Levant's, uphold the tradition that aligns the totality of the musical experience with bygone plenitude—a plenitude that, as psycho-analytic critics would remind us, is anchored to the maternal body.

It is the unfortunate film auditor who seems to suffer most in all of this: theorists claim that this listener is usually lost, immersed in the imaginary auditory relations that music affords. So extreme is this immersion that musicians like Kurt London have been led to write:

Music heard in the concert-hall differs fundamentally from music heard with film, because absolute music is apprehended consciously, film music, unconsciously. In the course of the musical illustration of a film familiar or characteristic bars of music may have struck the filmgoer once or twice, but otherwise he could hardly have told you, especially in an instance of well-made

²⁹ Max Steiner, 'Scoring the Film', in N Naumburg (ed), *We Make the Movies*, New York, Norton, 1937, p 226 (emphasis added).

³⁰ Oscar Levant, *A Smattering of Ignorance*, New York, Doubleday, 1940, p 90.

³¹ Most of Adorno's work on music advances this polemic (e.g., *An Introduction to the Sociology of Music*; his work with Hanns Eisler, etc). An interesting variation on Adorno's argument is taken up by John Shepherd in his essay, 'Media, Social Process and Music', in J Shepherd, P Virden, G Vulliamy and T Wishart (eds), *Whose Music? A Sociology of Musical Languages*, London, Latimer, 1977, pp 7-52. Shepherd has several other essays included in this anthology which address the issue of music and the 'pre-cultural'.

³² Kurt London, *Film Music*, (trans E. Bensinger), London, Faber and Faber, 1936, p. 37. London goes on to state that the unconscious component of film music gives film its sense of 'dramatic completeness'.

³³ Roger Tallon, interviewed in 'La musique utilitaire', *Musique en jeu*, no 24, September 1976, pp. 68-74.

³⁴ Suzanne Langer (from *Feeling and Form*), quoted in Richard Dyer, 'Entertainment and Utopia', in Rick Altman (ed), *The Musical*, London, BFI, 1981, p. 178.

³⁵ Miklos Rozsa, quoted in Gérard Blanchard, *op cit*, p. 166.

³⁶ See Sigmund Freud, 'Femininity' in *New Introductory Lectures in Psychoanalysis*, (trans James Strachey), New York, Norton 1965, p. 125. For a recent account of this notion of epistemological differences between gendered subjects, see Mary Ann Doane, 'Film and the Masquerade: Theorising the Female Spectator', *Screen* September-October 1982, vol 23 nos 3-4, pp. 74-88.

³⁷ Elmer Bernstein, quoted in Tony Thomas, *op cit*, p. 193.

³⁸ Kurt London, *op cit*, p. 126.

³⁹ Simon Frith, 'Mood Music: An Inquiry

*film music, what he had really heard. Only at points where the music diverged from the picture, whether in its quality or meaning, was his concentration on the picture disturbed. Thus we reach the conclusion that good film music remains 'unnoticed'.*³²

London's observation characterises most discussions of auditory identification in the cinema. According to this position, the film auditor is placed in an unmediated relationship to the music, directly experiencing its presumed raw emotionalism. Roger Tallon, for instance, states that music 'is almost directly plugged into the psyche'³³, Suzanne Langer argues that the forms and structures of music duplicate the 'forms of human feeling', claiming dramatically that 'music is a total analogue of emotive life.'³⁴ Film composer Miklos Rozsa adds, 'Film music must be essentially direct.... Certainly pure music offers me the possibility of the deepest kind of self-expression'.³⁵

The claim that musical meaning can be 'immediately' comprehended by Rozsa's imagined listener recalls Doane's observation regarding the ideological underpinnings of sound's association with intuition and emotionalism. It also calls to mind Freud's account of masculine and feminine modes of knowledge, in which he stresses that while male subjects are not immediately impressed by the significance of the female genitalia (for only time and distance enable their threat of castration to become apparent to the boy), the exposure of male genitalia to young girls, on the other hand, compels them to 'at once notice the difference and, it must be admitted, its significance too'.³⁶ If proximity—or the 'lack' of voyeuristic and temporal distance on which male epistemological gain is based—defines the relationship of the female subject to knowledge and understanding, the apprehension of music, then, described in terms of immediacy and directness, proceeds in theoretically feminine terms.

Given these theoretical presumptions, it comes as little surprise that music's emotional and feminine associations play such a conspicuous role in accounts of film music listening. It is also not surprising that these properties are subsequently discarded as meaningless. As film composer Elmer Bernstein says, 'Music is particularly emotional: if you are affected by it, you don't have to ask what it means.'³⁷ It is curious that critics who would have music pose a threat to signification in film compel it at the same time to embellish and round out textual signification. They repeatedly disavow music's potential for meaningfulness, usually by affiliating it with one or more other film elements. In a passage that recalls Freud's ruminations on music, London writes that 'music must have its meaning', and that there should always exist 'good reason for its sound to be heard'³⁸. Simon Frith responds to this idea:

it's surprising how often in film music it is asserted, in Schoenberg's words, that 'music never drags a meaning around with it,' that it is non-representational, 'abstract art par excellence' (Eisler), 'useless' (Adorno). Such assertions are the basis of numerous accounts of how a film's musical system supports or counters its 'visual system'.³⁹

Although Frith is clearly critical of this tendency, he nonetheless fails to move entirely beyond it since he collapses the idea of music's so-called 'meaninglessness' with its 'non-representability'. Is the non-representational so utterly devoid of meaning as these critics would suggest? Cixous argues that this in fact cannot be the case: 'Men say there are two unrepresentable things: death and the feminine sex.'⁴⁰ Perhaps to this we should add music as a third, and acknowledge quite simply that the various kinds of meanings these three phenomena produce have remained by and large unexplored.

III. Film Music and the Hollywood Melodrama

An analysis of several Hollywood films will demonstrate that there is indeed available a variety of meanings and modes of address in film music. Two film genres in particular, the musical and the melodrama, deserve special attention in this regard since both rely so very heavily—even etymologically—on the idea of music. And it is equally important to note that these genres to which music has been so central have been traditionally received with critical disdain, a disdain which has distinctly *not* been shared by the predominantly female audiences that enjoy these films. As feminist film critics from Molly Haskell on have averred, it is not incidental that male critics have long treated women's genres like the musical and melodrama with contempt and hostility. The following discussion will focus on film melodrama, where the stakes for a feminist study of music seem especially high.⁴¹

Just as Peter Brooks argues that melodrama has historically and generically involved the struggle to achieve expression over muteness, to 'express all'. So too is woman's struggle (to re-invoke Kristeva) to 'find a specific discourse closer to the body and emotions, to the unnameable repressed by the social contract'⁴². In a recent article on melodrama, Tania Modleski puts the matter succinctly:

*If women are hysterics in patriarchal culture because, according to the feminist argument, their voice has been silenced or repressed, and if melodrama deals with the return of the repressed through a kind of conversion hysteria [i.e., in its 'excessive' stylistic markings which symptomatically appear on the 'body' of the film text], perhaps women have been attached to the genre because it provides an outlet for the repressed feminine voice.*⁴³

There are a number of ways that music is said to give rise to this repressed voice and gain meaning. Dominique Avron writes that the movement of melody

*directly paints the movement of the soul, a result the other arts cannot achieve except indirectly by representing either the causes which have determined the movement of the words, or the gestures and the exterior attitudes which come after it. . . . Music is received by the interior from the exterior but as with all cultural items, it takes its source at the interior.*⁴⁴

into Narrative Film', *Screen*, May-June 1984, vol 25 no 3, p79.

⁴⁰ Hélène Cixous, op cit, p 255.

⁴¹ I write here of melodramatic forms at large at the risk of making generalisations to which particular films may not apply. Some of my subsequent comments will, however, address themselves to the subgenre of melodrama which has received considerable attention in recent feminist criticism and theory, the maternal melodrama and the woman's film.

⁴² Julia Kristeva, 'Women's Time', (trans A Jardine and H Blake), *Signs*, Autumn 1981, pp 24-25.

⁴³ Tania Modleski, 'Time and Desire in the Woman's Film', *Cinema Journal*, spring 1984, vol 23, no 3, p 21.

⁴⁴ Dominique Avron, 'Notes pour introduire une métapsychologie de la musique', *Musique en jeu* no 9, op cit, pp 102 and 104.

Avron employs metaphors of interiority and exteriority in a way that emphasises the constant interplay between music's subjective, immediate realm and its external representation, distinguishing his argument from other critics who argue for a simple one-to-one correspondence between the two and the relative autonomy of both (as in the claim that music can remain untainted by symbolic forms, conventions, etc). Pushed further, Avron's observations would have music—so often immured within the non-signifying order of the imaginary—involving at once externality and distance as well as interiority and proximity.

Melodrama engages music and other non-representational elements (colour, texture, movement, melody and so on) in a very similar interplay: the genre deals with recognisable themes of everyday life, domesticity and intimacy, while, at the same time, these themes receive dramatic and hyperbolically stylised expression. Constantly struggling between these registers, melodrama, like music, oscillates between notions of proximity and distance, representational and non-representational meanings.

Richard Dyer's article on the Hollywood musical, 'Entertainment and Utopia', equips us with another useful way in which we might begin to investigate music and other non-representational elements of melodrama. Concerned with the musical as entertainment, Dyer argues that through escape and wish fulfilment, entertainment ultimately concerns itself with a utopian sensibility, presenting the filmgoer with 'what utopia would feel like rather than how it would be organised'. Yet he insists that these codes operate at culturally and historically precise levels, never immuring non-representational components within a timeless, static essence. (We might ask ourselves here about the utopian codes that direct themselves to a female spectator/auditor.) Dyer goes on to say that the non-representational signs that help construct the 'feel' of utopia have not been well attended by film critics. He notes, for instance, that 'the mise-en-scène approach . . . tends to treat the non-representational as a function of the representational, simply a way of bringing out, emphasizing aspects of plot, character, situation, without signification in their own right.'⁴⁵ This statement is remarkably similar to the way film music commentators have treated music's relationship to the image track.

We turn now to a brief discussion of music's function within the Hollywood melodrama in order to expand the parameters of these debates, exploring the possibility of non-representational meaning as well as woman's relationship to these meanings and pleasures. *Backstreet* (directed by John Stahl, 1932) deals with the unfulfilled personal utopia of its heroine, Ray Schmidt (Irene Dunne). The film score intimately involves itself with a moment of missed opportunity (so common to melodrama) and helps articulate Ray's desire for this lost event. The story begins at the turn of the century. Ray has made plans to meet her lover, Walter (John Boles), and his mother, whom she has not yet met, at a park gazebo where the three will hear a small brass band. A problem at home prevents Ray from making the appointment in time and, conse-

⁴⁵ Richard Dyer, *op cit*, pp 177 and 179, respectively.

quently, from ever marrying Walter. Throughout the rest of the film she remains his kept lover until the very end when, in her dying moments, she reconstructs 'what would have happened if I'd met your mother in the park'. The small band plays as she is finally united with Walter and his mother in her imagined flashback.

In this pivotal scene Ray's desire clearly revolves around music (the band) and the maternal (Walter's mother). Both represent a certain pleasure for her that is characterised by a profound sense of nostalgia. Yet even though Ray's desire appears to replicate the nostalgic yearning of the male subject of psychoanalysis for the musical, maternal element, we can see that significant differences exist. For *Backstreet* demonstrates the *impossibility* of this imaginary union, frustrating the desire of its subject, not accommodating the subject with a false sense of plenitude. The utopian moment of the gazebo scene—though very important as an active expression of Ray's desire—works in tandem with other elements that remind us that this past is, in the end, an impossible past. (Martin Rubin has commented that Ray actively rejects the advent of time throughout the course of the film, as is demonstrated by her choice of Walter over Karl, a suitor who literally promises her a future and who introduces himself as an inventor of the automobile—the ultimate symbol of twentieth century progress.⁴⁶)

The voice of the past and of unfulfilled utopia is encoded in music, which, significantly, is kept relatively discrete from dialogue and sound effects on the soundtrack, as Rubin has also pointed out. The film seems to hold dialogue and language, for all their logic and representational capabilities, in high suspicion. Gossip maligns Ray, since language carries with it the power of naming her illicit relationship with Walter—and it is no accident that Ray, the perfect melodramatic heroine, tells Walter on one of their first meetings that 'names don't matter'. Both thematically and within the score itself, then, instrumental music serves as the chief expression of Ray's wordless desire. Yet, far from remaining on the outside of meaning and operating as a passive lack, music plays a very active role in organising the film around her personal utopia. When Ray conjures forth the missed rendezvous at the park, the music effectively re-writes the event with her, modifying it to accommodate her desires which, up to this point, had been repressed. In sum, *Backstreet* demarcates a space for feminine desire, with music as its conduit, and yet does not encourage the subject's total immersion within the musical moment. The 'transcendental etude' Rosolato claims to hear in the mother and child reunion assumes, in this particular film, only the imagined strains of a very tiny brass band. -

Other melodramas work to make the female subject's special relationship to music active, pleasurable and meaningful, and recent critics have been quick to seize upon these instances which work to address feminine desire. Lea Jacob's reading of *Now Voyager* (directed by Irving Rapper, 1942) examines the interplay between language, which she associates with men, and the less representationally oriented expressions of women. *Now Voyager* follows the progression of Charlotte Vale (Bette

⁴⁶ Martin Rubin 'The Voice of Silence: Sound Style in John Stahl's *Backstreet*', in E Weis and J Belton, *op cit*, pp 277-285.

Davis) from an hysterical child-spinster under her mother's repressive hand to a 'healthy', eroticised adult who finally rights the wrongs of her own parent by symbolically playing mother to the daughter of her married lover, Jerry (Paul Henreid). Jacobs observes how excerpts from the poetry of Walt Whitman (whence the title of the film) and prescriptive advice of Charlotte's male therapist, Dr Jacquith (Claude Rains) open and, to an extent, catalyse the film's narrative. But she is quick to qualify her observation:

*While the narrative is the doctor's work, it is not his trajectory. It is important to remember that Jacquith is outside of desire, or at least outside the circuit of desire which provides us with the problematic of the couple. The very abstractness of his character leaves room for an identification with Charlotte.*⁴⁷

Jacobs then suggests that since Jacquith's masculine, word fixated discourse fails to account for Charlotte's desire, her desire seeks expression through less directly representational means. The elaborate, lush harmonies of the film's music provide such a medium, the non-representational sign that carries both affect and meaning. (Significantly, Max Steiner composed the film score—his style, it would seem, is perfectly adapted to the 'excesses' required by the melodramatic genre.) This score serves an important function in a scene that is at once significant in terms of the film's narrative (i.e., logically, representationally) and in terms of Charlotte's desire (expressed musically, non-representationally). Music eventually usurps the function of the word when Charlotte takes a boat cruise as a 'cured' woman:

*The reading of the Whitman poem does not signal the departure of the boat from New York. The beginning of the trip is elided and we enter into a voyage already underway, the ship at sea. This sudden burst into the midst of a narrative takes the form of a number of shots which can be read as bursts of sexual pleasure: the dissolve from the still, medium-shot of Charlotte reading to the infinitely extending depth of the sea, the swell in the music, the explosion of steam from a whistle.*⁴⁸

A scene from *All that Heaven Allows* (directed by Douglas Sirk, 1955) further illustrates the weight musical meaning carries in film. It features the widowed Cary Scott (Jane Wyman) sitting down at her piano to play the film's theme song, a piece which has accompanied much of the narrative up to this point. By controlling the performance of the piece, however momentarily (for her playing is interrupted when another character enters the room), this scene not only suggests that the song is Cary's but that she oversees a significant portion of the film's narrative rhythm. Cary is shown gazing at the wooden sheet-music stand just above the keyboard, yet, in a striking detail, her eyes don't alight on a score (for she is playing without sheet music), but rather on her own image reflected on the shiny wooden surface. Thus hers becomes a private act where woman literally plays to and for herself, producing representations of

⁴⁷ Lea Jacobs, 'Now Voyager: Some Problems of Enunciation and Sexual Difference', *Camera Obscura* no 7, 1982, p 95.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*

herself in an erotic moment unmediated by phallic intrusion. And since the musical theme paradigmatically refers to many other moments in the film narrative, it is not without significance in the text and cannot be dismissed as 'meaningless'.⁴⁹

Film melodrama links woman's desire with music in less romantically coded moments as well. One need only think of the 'sultry' jazz of Sarah Jane's (Susan Kohner) private dance numbers in *Imitation of Life* (directed by Douglas Sirk, 1959). Hers is an intimate desire that goes public when she later performs as a nightclub artist. Mahalia Jackson's moving gospel performance during Annie's (Juanita Moore) funeral at the end of the same film not only signifies the glory Annie has found in death (which, if we remember Cixous, is unrepresentable in a masculine economy), but does so extravagantly as an excessive spectacle. This spectacle, like Sarah Jane's dances, is charged with activity at two extremes: on the one side, emotionalism and immediacy and on the other (by virtue of its large-scale grandeur) a sense of distance and display.

In other melodramas this tension often assumes more dissonant forms, calling into question the appeasing and 'harmonic' function traditionally ascribed to film music. Curiously, these examples can frequently be found in more masculine melodramatic subgenres. *Lost Weekend* (directed by Billy Wilder, 1945) and *Bigger Than Life* (directed by Nicholas Ray, 1956) deal with the problem of alcohol and drug addiction and its disruptive effects on the family and friends of the male protagonists, Don Birnam (Ray Milland) and Ed Avery (James Mason). The instrumentation of the two film scores merits a note of attention. Instead of the lavish proto-symphonic scoring that routinely exploits the string section (and its concomitant codes of emotionalism and romance), composers Miklos Rozsa and David Raksin respectively deploy highly idiosyncratic sound sources: the former, using the little-known theremin and the latter orchestrating the noise of a fairground carnival. This instrumentation underscores thematically important scenes (as Don and Ed lose their respective holds on reality), and both sets of sound promote a chilling dissonance and unease that do little to invite their auditors to immerse or 'lose' themselves in comfortable, maternal rhythms and harmonies.⁵⁰ This kind of jarring, unsettling effect is even more pronounced in the 1955 melodrama *The Cobweb* (directed by Vincente Minnelli), which, historians claim, was one of the first Hollywood films to make extensive use of atonal music. Certainly it is hard to imagine how these dissonant musical forms could serve any sort of comforting maternal function in which auditors might immerse or lose themselves.

IV. Conclusion

Music's relation to psychic activity—however intimate it may be—is a mediated one: its unconscious pleasures actively participate within rigorously organised symbolic systems. This is not to say that all of the meanings of film music are readily accessible, but rather to stress that

⁴⁹ My thanks to Patrice Petro for sharing her remarks on this scene with me.

⁵⁰ David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960*, New York, Columbia Univ Press, 1985, argues that, in Hollywood music of this period, atonality was used to connote human mental imbalance and neurosis, and, as characters eventually became 'cured' the score would likewise be 'saved' by a return to tonality.

undue emphasis has been placed on music's alleged inability to provide any information that hasn't already been established by the image track. For music does have its meanings in cinema, although they may not be inscribed according to the conventions of standard representational practice. Music constantly oscillates between meaning and 'meaninglessness', representational and non-representational functions, and because of this it cannot be claimed that it uniformly or unproblematically inhabits one extreme or the other. Such polarisation insists that significance can only be gained through the representational—that pitch, rhythm, instrumentation and so on are without effects. (Following this line of thought there would be no significant difference in the function of the scores for *Now Voyager* and *Lost Weekend*.) In light of all this, it would be very difficult indeed to argue that film music functions in a consistent, singular way or that it makes a uniform appeal to a specific group or subjectivity.

Furthermore, to argue, as theorists have, that film auditors 'lose' themselves in imaginary fusion with the film score and that the score itself performs a narcotising maternal function diminishes the role of both music and auditor in the production of meaning and effects in the cinema. More particularly, the feminine metaphor used to describe these types of relationships must be apprehended with extreme care. It is one thing to suggest that music offers woman a discursive place in which her desire is provisionally articulated; it is entirely another to argue that music is essentially, irrevocably 'feminine'.

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'THE CLASSICAL HOLLYWOOD CINEMA'

A REVIEW BY BARRY KING

¹ David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985. (Hereafter *CHC* in text, with page references in brackets.) David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, London, Methuen, 1985. Edward Branigan, *Point of View in the Cinema: a Theory of Narration and Subjectivity in Classical Film*, Mouton, 1985.

² London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983.

³ London, British Film Institute, 1985.

IT IS SOMETHING of a rebuke, if a fortuitous one, that the diversionary excesses of British Film Year should have also seen the publication of the culminating *tranche* of a series of texts, more or less connected with the University of Wisconsin, that attempt, and in many ways succeed in, a major re-siting of the relationship between the poetics of film and cinema history.¹

At the outset – and this is not to entertain for one moment unworthy notions of cinepatriotism – it is worth observing that the productiveness of research, its capacity to generate not theories, which are plentiful, but research programmes that test and refine theories, relies squarely on institutional support. One can ask whether the material conditions of British academia would enable the production of texts with the comprehensive sweep of *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*? Naturally enough considerations of geography, not to mention publishing policy, have a bearing here, but it is striking that much writing on the British Cinema in recent times, e.g. James Curran and Vincent Porter, *British Cinema History*², Martyn Auty and Nick Roddick, *British Cinema Now*³, has taken an essay form with all that such a form implies in terms of provisionality of argument and conclusion. One need not assume that synthesis or Grand Theory is of itself a desirable goal – it can lead, as in general I shall argue the texts here do, to a disabling level of abstraction from social and ideological practices. But if, as is sometimes asserted, enquiry is better served by a strong foe than a thousand weak allies, the texts considered here represent a timely reminder of what is achievable in terms of breadth of theoretical engagement and evidence given a favourable institutional setting, not to mention skill and talent in film analysis. One may disagree with the ultimate configuration of what may be called the Wisconsin project, but the future study and teaching of popular cinema will have to engage with its arguments.

At a more immediate level, it is clear that *Screen*, not least because it has in the past published some preliminary work on which the current

analyses are based⁴ and because it is either directly or indirectly challenged by the arguments presented, has a particular responsibility to assess what the thrust of the arguments presented imply for the state of film theory. This obligation is enhanced somewhat by the fact that the central text – *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* – has already entered the folklore of one branch of cultural studies as a work of transcendent virtuosity – the *Aufhebung* of the limitations of traditional art history and ‘Screen style’ theory.⁵ While it is doubtful that the authors would accept unconditionally such a freeze-dried appreciation of their work, such statements indicate the extent to which that work is seen as raising the pursuit of film studies and cinema history to new heights of rigour and evidence.

In what follows, the first part of an extended review, I want to challenge this assessment, not on grounds of alternative evidence or an alternative reading of the same evidence, but in terms of the coherence of the arguments presented and their relationship to arguments not presented. It is to be hoped, and this is hardly a matter of doubt, that evidentially based assessments will follow in due course: indeed, there is enough in *CHC* alone to occupy a platoon of theses.⁶ In this part, I base my assessment on what is arguably the central text – or at least the text that claims to ground the others in history – *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*. Viewed overall the Wisconsin project enters claims to have (a) determined the nature of Hollywood as a ‘mode of production’; (b) to have specified the Classical Film as a ‘mode of film practice’; (c) to have elaborated a new narrative poetics of film; (d) to have redefined the theory of the viewing subject, or in their preferred term, the spectator. These claims, in fact, are intrinsic to all three texts, either as corroborative instances or as reappearing agents of the analysis, so the separation is slightly artificial; nonetheless, the depth of the argument in each case requires a separate analysis. In what follows I will be concentrating on the first and second strands of this proliferating set of arguments and theories.

I.

The key theoretical thrust of *CHC*, which falls for the most part to Janet Staiger to elaborate, is to establish a strong extra-textual grounding in the organisational configuration of the studio system for the analysis of stylistic factors with which the book opens. To some extent, this objective, which signals its allegiance by reference to Raymond Williams and other Marxist sources as falling within the problematic of cultural materialism, can be seen as the key innovation of the text. The stylistic formation indicated by the term ‘classical film’ – classical because of its ‘notions of decorum, proportion, formal harmony, respect for tradition, mimesis, self effacing craftsmanship and cool control of the perceiver’s response’ (pp 3-4) and the presumed widespread adoption of such

⁴ See for example, Edward Branigan, ‘Formal Permutations of the Point of View Shot’, *Screen* Autumn 1975, vol 16 no 3, pp 54-64; Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell, ‘Space and Narrative in the Films of Ozu’, *Screen* Summer 1976, vol 17 no 2, pp 41-73; Janet Staiger, ‘Individualism vs Collectivism’, *Screen* July-October 1983, vol 24 nos 4-5, pp 68-79.

⁵ A. L. Rees and F. Borzello, *The New Art History*, London, Camden Press, 1986, p 9.

⁶ The obvious comparison would be Barry Salt’s work, which in many respects constitutes a clear precedent for much of the materials presented in *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*. A parallel reading of Barry Salt, *Film Style and Technology: History and Analysis*, London, Starword, 1983, would reward the exegete.

⁷ Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell, 'Space and Narrative in the Films of Ozu', op cit. But also David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film Art: an Introduction*, Reading, Mass, Addison-Wesley, 1979.

⁸ cf John B Thompson, *Studies in the Theory of Ideology*, Polity Press, 1984.

criteria in the studio period – will have been encountered by readers of Bordwell and Thompson's early work⁷. In this sense, the analysis entered into here can be considered as providing the ground of this earlier analysis. Such a grounding, if successful, would be able to show how stylistic factors emerge from – and by means of sustaining their own integral mode of functioning – secure the reproduction of the social relationships in which the agents and agencies of production are placed.⁸

The Classical Hollywood Cinema, the authors argue (p xiv), will provide a unique supersession of the tendency in film theory for analyses to confine themselves solely to the consideration of the text, its mode of effectivity and 'working' on the one hand or to a delineation of the configuration of industrial and economic organisation on the other. Whether this separatism is quite as sharp as the authors suggest, it clearly constitutes one of the key aporias in contemporary analyses of cultural production.

The central concept deployed is the 'mode of film practice', which 'constitutes an integral system, including persons and groups, but also rules, films, machinery, documents, institutions, work processes and theoretical concepts' (p xii). As a nominal concept, the mode of film practice is defined as consisting of two inter-related moments – a stylistic configuration demarcated by a 'set of widely held' – as opposed, one takes it, to hegemonically reproduced – norms 'about how a movie should behave, about what stories it properly tells and how it should tell them, about the range and functions of film technique'. Such a set of norms is 'created, shaped and supported' within a mode of production – 'a characteristic ensemble of economic aims, a specific division of labour, and particular ways of conceiving and executing the work of film-making' (p xiv).

The normative ingredients of this mode of film practice also include certain assumptions about the activities of the spectator. But since the authors take the realms of style and production as primary, these matters, plus the question of the concrete conditions of reception, are not accorded extended treatment. For all that, the authors introduce certain issues concerning the spectator's activity and the role of advertising in the establishment of classical canons, that will be 'necessary' in any future study of consumption (p xiv). The degree to which this is both an understatement and an overstatement will be explored in part two of this review.

Let us note a few preliminary definitional difficulties. The authors suggest that their analysis is based on a conception of the 'relations between film style and mode of production... [as]... reciprocal and mutually influencing' (p xiv) and this is reiterated at several points. The terms of the ensuing analysis are teasingly vague and ambiguous, but the 'conditions of existence of a film practice' are defined, following John Ellis, as production practices, economic practices and ideological/signifying practices – though political practices are at the outset laid aside. As a matter of definition, production practices are identified as a 'form of factory production'; economic practices as *standardisation* in the inter-

ests of efficiency and *product differentiation* in the interests of competition; ideological/signifying practices as the contours of a 'group style' that became 'film practice for Hollywood' (pp 88-89). Reviewing the definition of mode of production offered earlier – 'a characteristic ensemble of economic aims, a specific division of labour, and particular ways of conceiving and executing the work of filmmaking' – the reader might be tempted to assume that these three practices constitute the mode of production. However, mode of production is taken to refer 'specifically to production practices' (p 89) the form of which 'it is useful to classify as mass production' (p 92).

Two general points can be made about this mesmerising whirl of concepts. First, the pattern of influence is skewed very strongly from reciprocity to the dominance of the mode of production/production practices by film style. Not only is it the argument that overall – despite the fact that 'on occasion' production practices caused certain stylistic techniques – production practices were an *effect* of economic and ideological/signifying practices (p 142), but *also* 'in the balance between economical production and a presumed effect on film, the latter won out' (p 89). Again:

The classical style was critical in reinforcing both economic practices (e.g. cost efficiency) and ideological/signifying practices (e.g. the standard of the quality film). Within the mode of production . . . the tendency to focus energy and capital toward controlled uniformity all crucially depend upon the norms of the classical style. (p 367)

Thus this examination of the Hollywood mode of production, far from providing an analytical and historical context to tease out the points of contradiction, displacement and asymmetry across and within material practices, becomes a pretext for the demonstration of the primacy of style. This brings me to my second general point: how is this suppression activated in an account so apparently committed to the enumeration of concrete organisational and institutional detail? The answer is: by a merely formalist treatment of the empirical details involved. To make this clear, it is best to start where Staiger starts – with the mode of production.

In Staiger's account, the term mode of production is sometimes rendered as a rough equivalent to production practices as pointed out above. This usage is not always consistent, however, because at other times she contrasts job position, order of work and mode of production (p 153). However, her general definition of mode of production is clear and in certain respects it follows Marx's specification. A mode of production is composed of a *labour force*, 'workers involved directly and indirectly in the production of the film or the production of the physical means to make them'; a *system of hierarchical control or management*, which defines the range of jobs, their span of competence, the line of authority; and *the means of production*, all physical capital or plant, such as raw materials, tools and technology, buildings, and the means of finance (pp 89-90). Subsequently, any consideration of the form of finance, e.g.

⁹ G A Cohen, *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defence*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1978, pp 79-84.

¹⁰ For example, Larry Ceplair and Steve Englund, *The Inquisition in Hollywood: Politics in the Film Community 1930-1960*, New York, Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1980 and Michael Nielsen, 'Towards a Workers' History of the U.S. Film Industry,' in Vincent Mosco and Janet Wasko (eds), *The Critical Communications Review: Volume 1, Labor, the Working Class and the Media*, p 47 ff, New Jersey, Ablex, 1983.

¹¹ Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, Monthly Review Press, 1974.

internal financing versus debt financing, or its source, e.g. banks or conglomerates, in the position of whole or part owner, is ruled out of consideration on the grounds, which can certainly be disputed, that this did not affect the management function.

In terms of fidelity to sources, we can note that this definition – while warranted in part by the fact that Marx uses the term ambiguously – actually constitutes a *material* rather than a *social* definition of the concept of mode of production. (The latter would emphasise the relationships of expropriation and the forms in which surplus labour, surplus product or surplus value are extracted from the direct producers.⁹) Accordingly, those looking for a history of class exploitation in Hollywood should look elsewhere.¹⁰

Since the provision of capital, whether in terms of plant or finance – not to mention the question of theatre ownership, distribution networks, etc – is excluded from consideration, the term mode of production shrinks in Staiger's account to denote the organisation of work, the extent of its division of labour and its system of management. In considering the division of labour (which she refers to as 'work') she deploys a distinction, based on her reading of Harry Braverman's *Labor and Monopoly Capital*¹¹, between the *social division mode* and *detail division mode* of work organisation. In the former, the direct producer has the role of 'all-round' worker, exercising composite skills and powers of conception and execution. In the latter, the direct producer is increasingly confined to the execution of molecular tasks, over which he or she has no conceptualising control. The term 'system of management' is used to indicate various moments of work organisation, according to which functionary in middle ('above the line') management has the power to determine conceptual or 'creative' decision making. Accordingly, it is possible to periodise the emergent film industry in terms of a succession of management systems: the '*cameraman*' system prior to 1907, which constitutes a social division mode; and then five specific systems which split the detail division mode – the '*director*' system, 1907-09; the '*director-unit*' system, 1909-14; the '*central producer*' system, 1914 to the early '30s; the '*producer unit*' system, early 1930s to mid '50s; the '*package unit*' system, emergent in the early '40s and dominant from the mid '50s on (pp 91-93). Though these systems are rendered diachronically, it is also made clear that a synchronic slice into the industry structure would reveal the co-existence of one or other of these forms at any given time (p 325ff).

These distinctions are undoubtedly useful, but there are problems with the way Staiger applies them. It might be supposed that the discussion of management systems would lead to a discussion of the various regimes of representation that follow from these different social relations of production – in short, to a consideration of differences in studio output or of units within studios. But this is not the case, because a management system is not in itself seen as a sufficient marker of difference in the mode of production. On the contrary, such systems are merely the phenomenal forms of an underlying constancy – in this case the detailed

division (of labour) mode which now becomes reductively assimilated to the mode of production *per se* (p 93). Given these reductions, it is possible for the authors to claim that there is a Hollywood mode of production. So whereas once it used to be argued that all Hollywood films were the same because they were capitalist, we now discover that they are the same because they involve a detailed division of labour: a no less stultifying observation.

... whether a central producer or a producer unit-system controlled the work decisions, all of the department organizations followed the standard structures and work practices. Despite the apparent differences among studios' management structures, production practices were overwhelmingly uniform across the industry. (p 325)

Even in its own terms this claim is inconsistent: the 'sameness' of the production practices is portrayed as the result of the fragmentation of the labour process on the one hand, and the divorce of conception from execution on the other, *in order* to establish management control over the labour process and every step in it. If we allow that management can fail in this aim or that sections of management are subject to the process of fragmentation as well, it still follows that somewhere in the work order agents are empowered to impart 'meaning' to the flow of product across routinised procedures. Such is the rationale for Staiger's typology in the first place. But one needn't accept the notion of 'creativity' or auteurism to recognise that *which* functionary, with *what* professional, social and personal characteristics, makes a difference to the way in which even a standardised ensemble of practices and techniques is activated. Naturally enough, it is possible to claim that such differences, not to mention less stable textual processes of 'excess', are trivial. But then the task is to show this by exploring the range of difference as well as sameness.

The contention that the standardisation of work practices, etc, is matched by a standardisation in the use of such practices is, of course, what this study's textual analysis is designed to demonstrate. To this extent the concept of standardisation of technique and technology is the most immediate point at which the textual and extratextual intertwine. Both terms of the argument—extratextual and textual standardisation—must be established if the authors' postulate of a 'reciprocal and mutual influencing' is to hold up. I have suggested that the terms of the analysis of the 'economic' in fact lead to the primacy of the 'stylistic', not by means of a denial of economic influence, which would be absurd, but by a relative negation of its full effectivity. The most obvious, as opposed to discursively embedded, example of this turns around the treatment of the concept of mass production.

It is a commonplace that Hollywood was a form of 'factory' production and one of the virtues of Staiger's analysis is that it shows the way to bring a greater precision to such commonplaces. My reservation is that it is not thought through far enough in terms of the labour process. The thrust of her argument is to establish the theoretical propriety of applying the logic of mass production of consumer durables like auto-

mobiles to the production of films. Since both systems exhibit a detailed division of labour, it *follows* that both will also exhibit similar processes of standardising work procedures and product design, with a minimalist variation of the surface features of the design adding 'product differentiation' (pp 90-92 and chapter nine). And if Hollywood is like Fords – Staiger does argue that this is not literally the case, but the differences are not sufficient on her account to overturn the homology – then the same imperative 'to insure the most efficient and economical work arrangement' (p 90) can be taken to govern the mass production of cars and films.

Staiger is then able to argue, which is undoubtedly correct, that by the early teens a detailed script, the *forerunner of the continuity script*, with its prioritisation of *découpage*, 'the parcelling out of images in accordance with the script, the mapping of the narrative onto the cinematic material' (p 60), became necessary to insure efficient (cost effective) production and the maintenance of quality. This development occurred against a background of growing demands for quality in production – specifically: narrative dominance and clarity, verisimilitude, continuity, stars and spectacle (p 96). Such demands, which at no point are considered in the light of their potential to clash or conflict, are promulgated or diffused through the industry by the institutional mechanisms of motion picture advertising, the development of trade associations like the Society of Motion Picture Engineers and craft unions or guilds that by their insistence on job demarcation merely reinforce standardisation, and by the burgeoning practices of motion picture criticism (p 97 ff).

Lest it be felt that this parallel is overdrawn and the drive towards standardisation rendered as an absolute, the reader is reminded of the role of product differentiation which provides the counter tension, always subordinate to standardisation, of innovation. 'For this reason filmmaking did not achieve the assembly line uniformity prevalent in other industries' (p 109). However, the flexibility of the system of standards, its capacity to affect paradigmatic substitutions of one technique for another in order to render its functions, serves to render all change as just another instance of eternal recurrence (p 108).

There are a number of problems with this account, apart from its obvious schematism. First, there is Staiger's own admission (p 93) that production in Hollywood remained a manufacturing division of labour. One of the features of such a division of labour, as Marx pointed out, is the clear limit it imposes on the extent to which the labour process can be divided and fragmented into smaller and smaller units of performance.¹² A detailed division of labour may operate within film production, but the density of the skills deployed in the process and its labour intensity mean that the process of fragmentation does not advance as far nor take the form observed in processes that are machine-based. Craft unions, for example, do not reinforce the process of fragmentation and deskilling – a grossly insulting formulation as anyone familiar with the history of labour struggles in the film industry will know – but arrest its fullest implementation. Without adjudicating on such 'restrictive'

¹² Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume One, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1976, p 489. See also Maxine Berg, *The Age of Manufactures*, London, Fontana, 1985, chapter 3.

practices, the fact remains that Staiger offers no detailed data to prove that her conflation of the division of labour in film-making and machinofacture is justified. Do the addition of specialisms, for instance with sound, narrow the demand for skills or reconstitute the demand on the basis of new skills? Do such developments increase the demand for unskilled as opposed to skilled workers? How does the total employment picture, numbers employed, balance between casual and full-time employment shift? These and other matters receive no serious examination in her arguments.

A second major consideration, by no means separate from the foregoing, of course, is the extent to which the schematic use of terms like 'standardisation' permit the evasion of a discussion of the specificities of film as a cultural commodity, of filmwork as a specific form of aesthetic labour.¹³ Such considerations tend to expose the legerdemain involved in the use of terms like 'efficiency', displaced from the discourse of quantitative production in the sphere of physical objects to the qualitative sphere of cultural objects. Indeed, since she is reliant on Braverman, it is surprising that the term efficiency can be deployed without the qualifier that it is capitalist efficiency—efficiency of control as well as level of output¹⁴—that underlies the discourse she deploys.

It is paradoxically the case that Staiger's rather selective (and eclectic) use of labour process concepts leads to a weakening of her argument—rather than giving it an apparent strength through elision. Had she concentrated on the way technology can be deployed to subject workers to capitalist control at the point of production she might have done much to advance her argument. The important distinction here is between the *formal* and *real* subsumption of labour. Marx¹⁵ compared the extent to which the direct producers have control over the labour process while being subject to capitalist relationships, e.g. wage labour—the relation of formal subsumption—to the circumstance in which the capitalist seizes control of the labour process itself and thereby controls the direct producers in the detail of execution—the relation of real subsumption. This is clearly one of the ideas behind the *social* and *detailed mode* contrast. The point worth exploring is this: to what extent does film as a technology of reproduction enable the co-existence of formal and real subsumption via the process of editing (or *découpage* which is, in a sense, a form of anticipatory editing)? The labour process of film-making could thereby remain skill intensive and yet be subsequently subject to a level of detail control on the editing table. An exploration of the modalities of this control might provide a way back to discussing the determination, and corresponding internal determinants, of film form. As it is, the deployment of terms like standardisation as a sort of rhetorical filter means that the role of ideological and economic determinants of film form are never concretely approached.¹⁶ Consequently the 'economic' becomes only the bearer of 'style'. To this extent, Staiger's 'materialist' analysis is an expression of the formalism that marks the analysis of style in the rest of the book. To these matters we must now turn.

¹³ See Michael Chanan, *Labour Power in the British Film Industry*, London, British Film Institute, 1976 and Bernard Miège, 'The Cultural Commodity', *Media, Culture and Society*, vol 1 no 3, 1979.

¹⁴ See Harry Braverman, op cit, p 90 ff and David Gordon, 'Capitalist Efficiency and Socialist Efficiency', *Monthly Review*, vol 28 no 3, 1976. Staiger mentions the potential for contradiction between engineering and aesthetic conceptions of efficiency on p 253 ff but this is not explored further.

¹⁵ Karl Marx, op cit, pp 948-1084, especially p 1019 ff.

¹⁶ For a contrasting approach see Paul Kerr, 'Out of What Past? Notes on the B Film Noir', *Screen Education* nos 32/33, Autumn 1979/80, pp 45-65.

¹⁷ See David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film Art*, op cit. But also Kristin Thompson, *Eisenstein's 'Ivan the Terrible': a Neo-Formalist Analysis*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1981.

¹⁸ Fredric Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1972, p 61. Note that the authors tend, *contra* Jameson, to see the *fabula* as solely a spectatorial phenomenon.

¹⁹ See V N Volosinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, New York, Seminar Press, 1973, especially Appendix 2; Fredric Jameson, op cit; and Tony Bennett, *Formalism and Marxism*, London, Methuen, 1979.

²⁰ Fredric Jameson, op cit, p 88.

²¹ Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975, p 118 and Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1983, pp 95-96.

²² David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film Art*, op cit, pp 27-28.

II.

As readers of their earlier work will know, Bordwell and Thompson have a longstanding commitment to developing the work of the Russian formalist tradition within film studies.¹⁷ Perhaps part of this enduring concern relates to the fact, as Fredric Jameson has pointed out, that film as a medium constitutes a material separation of form and content, the *fabula* being always given in advance of its technical embodiment.¹⁸

The general features of formalism have been subject to evaluation in a number of texts¹⁹ and it is not useful to reprise these arguments here. More to the point, the authors themselves make it perfectly clear that they adopt a formalist position, however modified, so that those convinced of the deficiencies of such a position are unlikely to be persuaded by the ensuing arguments.

To present these in outline, it is only necessary to emphasise the following: a formalist position leads to a decisive emphasis on defining the specificity of a given medium as a means of signification, especially as a means of narration, with techniques and their characteristic deployment being taken as the markers of the intrinsicality—the literariness or in Thompson's neologism, the 'cinematicness'—of the medium or media format.

The consequent emphasis on techniques and the recurrent patterning of their application—*style*—of itself unexceptional, is then usually combined with the precept that the specification of the 'poetics' of the medium or form is a self-sufficient activity, rather than a preliminary to the consideration of content or meaning²⁰. Thus it is possible to distinguish between an approach to the consideration of textual patterning ('structure', 'form', etc) which is concerned to determine the underlying processes that make literary or cinematic effects possible in order to materially locate the consideration of meaning, and an approach which abandons the question of meaning altogether, usually by the mechanism of rendering all 'content' an equal, hence redundant, expression of form.²¹ It is the latter approach that the authors unequivocally adopt. Thus in *Film Art* Bordwell and Thompson argue that content is not the opposite of form, but merely one of its manifestations, since form is the film in its entirety.²² Likewise, referring to *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, in a subsequent interview, Thompson observes:

... the basic difference between our approach and the **Screen** approach is probably that we don't privilege meaning. Much of what **Screen** has done has been either overtly or implicitly aimed at coming up with some sort of new hermeneutic method of interpreting films... meaning is still the thing that one goes into a film looking for. The whole notion of reading a film is a reflection of that, the notion that you translate everything in a film into some sort of sign that has a meaning. Again, I would say that Russian formalism doesn't reject the idea of interpretation or meaning but subsumes it into this notion of formalism, of form being the total set of relationships in the work.

*The basic operation we would perform we call analysis rather than a reading.*²³

The adoption of a formalist position—apart from the usefulness of various techniques of analysis, such as the use of the concept of ‘baring the device’ to demonstrate the extent to which classical narration suppresses its own artifice—could be argued at the outset, therefore, to guarantee the level of abstract continuity in the classical ‘paradigm’ that the authors claim. Much therefore depends on the validity of their analysis of the body of films in their sample. Before approaching this directly, it is necessary to point out that the authors attempt a major modification of formalism: namely the introduction of Staiger’s analysis as an institutional ground for the formal analysis of the ‘text’.²⁴ I have already suggested that this particular analysis is flawed and in fact more likely to spare the textual from extratextual determination than mark its interrelatedness. It has to be said, however, in order to forestall any misunderstanding, that in the course of providing an institutional grounding Bordwell and Thompson make some substantial contributions to the history of film technology and practice, for example, their discussion of the Mazda tests (p 294 ff) and their detailed discussion of the initial standardisation of film technology (p 262 ff). It seems likely that these findings (and others besides, e.g. the role of the short story, a particularly favoured object for formalist analysis, in the formation of film narrative) will withstand critique.

However, it should be noted that the conception of standardisation set in train by Staiger’s contribution troubles these accounts at times. Thompson, for example, as part of the delineation of the pervasiveness of the process informs the reader that ‘Hollywood would adopt camera technology’ only if it met the criteria of being capable of providing a clear steady image, of being controllable, or being durable, easy to handle and versatile (p 264). Similar requirements are found to be characteristic of lighting instruments (p 270). One would like to know what regime of visual representation would not require these qualities as *basic*, even if subsequent choices were made in use that departed from technical norms. If the authors were concerned at this point with some *epochal* shift in the anthropology of visual representation, such observations might have, if taken further, some explanatory bite.²⁵ Here, however, the rendering of general technical requirements or norms (within a given epoch of visual representation) as examples of the specific institutional requirements of an evolved group style is an example of over-explanation. As pointed out earlier, the use of a blanket term like standardisation can lead to a confusion between what the general features of a technology are, given the historicity and cultural relativism of the basic ‘fix’, and specific patterns of institutional usage. To equate the latter with the former both increases the causal weight of the explanation and blurs its specificity.

The evidential core of *CHC* consists of a sample of 100 studio-produced films from the 1916-1960 period, with slightly more than four-

²³ Kristin Thompson, interviewed in ‘The Formalist from Iowa, USA, who Fell in Love with Ivan the Terrible’, *Film News*, February-March 1986, p 10.

²⁴ cf Kristin Thompson, *Ivan the Terrible*, op cit, where she argues for the importance of historical context. Characteristically this is considered rendered by a contrast with the stylistic characteristics of two studio produced films. See also, ‘The Formalist from Iowa, USA...’, op cit, p 11.

²⁵ cf Claude Bailblé, ‘Programming the Look’, *Screen Education* nos 32/33 pp 99-131.

fifths of the films selected falling with near equal frequency into the 1917-28, 1929-39 and 1940-49 intervals. The authors point out that the selection procedure was guided by the use of random number tables, which produced out of a universe of some 15,000 or more studio produced feature films a list of 841 titles, of which 100 were located in various collections and sources in the US. The deployment of random selection is argued to provide a control against criteria of significance or taste influencing the analysis of style. Since, as pointed out earlier, the concept of the classical film was developed before the analyses undertaken here, the use of this procedure is crucial in providing an independent confirmation of what the authors have already concluded on the basis of earlier viewing and analysis.

The success of this procedure is difficult to assess. Though the authors give no clear indication, it seems unlikely that the selection procedure by random number tables was balanced in respect of the decade slices in which the sample is grouped. To demonstrate the persistence of the classical 'paradigm' across the interval 1917 to 1960, not to mention the presumption that it extends beyond this remit towards more recent years, for example *The China Syndrome* (1979), a balanced number of films should be sampled in each 'cell' of the sample. Strictly speaking, the fact that the claims for stability from 1950 onward rest on 13 films would lead one to attribute a lower level of reliability to these findings than to claims for 1917 to 1949 which involve between 25-30 films in each decade. (The fact that production declined from the '50s onward is not an issue here since the sample numbers are well below total output anyway, if only because of the sheer amount of labour involved in such detailed analyses.) Similarly, it is striking that for reasons of availability and/or random selection, the study privileges films produced and/or distributed by three major studios: Paramount, MGM and Warner Brothers constitute 48 per cent of the entire sample, with RKO and Twentieth Century-Fox constituting four and eight per cent respectively. It is to be expected, of course, that even random sampling would have thrown up a predominance of films by the majors, but it is a pity that the authors did not attempt to balance the proportion of films coming from each of the Big Five and Little Three, let alone other sources of product. Such a procedure would have, by maximising the number of films compared across studios, rendered the claims of stylistic uniformity despite differences in studio management even stronger – especially given the arguments advanced in Janet Staiger's account. Similar observations could be made in respect of the inclusion of 'Poverty Row' 'B' productions, but the point is clear enough: the claims for the unbiased sample should be treated with caution, not least because of the relatively small numbers involved (see p 10 and p 388 ff).

Against these reservations, which raise the question of whether a completely random selection procedure is the most appropriate method given a pre-structured universe of possibilities, the authors would doubtless point to the collateral use of 200 other films chosen on grounds of significance, typicality or preference whose analysis supplements the

findings of the unbiased sample (p 10). Unfortunately, the details of this latter sample, which is clearly meant to be validated by the unbiased sample, rather than vice-versa, are never given. It is difficult therefore to gauge the applicability of statements as concrete as: 'In the years 1915-16, a feature film (itself often only seventy five minutes long) might contain as few as 240 shots or as many as 1000' (p 60), given that the unbiased sample contains only one film of this vintage. Obviously, and despite what the text implies at this point, the validity of this statement rests on the extended sample (though I could identify on a quick count only 14 films from the years 1915-16). It is an implicit tribute to the high standards of the authors that these points are worth making at all. But the question of the decisiveness of their pronouncements remains, not least because they put so much emphasis on the unbiased sample as the guarantor of objectivity.

Given the constitution of the corpus of films for analysis, the authors construct by means of a close and acute textual analysis the lineaments of the classical paradigm, its emergence – but with greater tentativeness as I have suggested – from the primitive cinema and its transcendence (hegemony would be too weak a word) throughout the studio period 1917-1960. A basic definition of the classical Hollywood film as it emerges from this analysis is that it constitutes the subordination of cinematic time and space to a narrative logic that prioritises, through the process of its own effacement, a character-centred, goal-oriented form of causality. Other forms, such as generic, realistic and aesthetic motivation, are either revealed to be limited plays on the rules of compositional (causal) motivation or function as particular moments of such motivation: 'Genres are in one respect certain kinds of stories, endowed with their own particular logic that does not contest psychological causality or goal orientation' (p 20).

In a similar fashion, the star system argued by Richard Dyer, for example, to represent a challenge to narrative coherence because of the contradictory relations of textuality and intertextuality set up by the interaction of character and persona is rendered unproblematic on the grounds that instances of effective casting can be identified (p 14). Likewise, the *film noir* is argued to present no challenge to the classical film on the grounds that its stylistic and formal operations merely represent a conformity to the conventions of the hard-boiled detective novel (p 76). Such a formulation seems to equate the potential for challenge with the intention to challenge and to confuse the effectivity of a practice with its origins.

The conservative shading of these and other interpretations seems relatively clear and to some extent can be derived more or less directly from the formalist position. The difference is that here such readings are made in the context of an empirical demonstration that annotates both the evolution of specific techniques from primitive cinema and their recurrent deployment within the classical film – techniques of editing, framing, lighting, camera movement, etc, and the continuity rules that govern their deployment. I have already suggested some problems with

²⁶ cf Nicos Hadjinicolaou, *Art History and Class Struggle*, London, Pluto, 1978. Hadjinicolaou defines style – his term is ‘visual ideology’ – as ‘a specific combination of the formal and thematic elements of a picture through which people express the way they relate their lives to the conditions of their existence, a combination which constitutes a particular form of the overall ideology of a social class’, pp 95–96.

the seeming solidity of the evidence from the unbiased sample, though I am not inclined to doubt the authors’ claims to have identified specific instantiations of given techniques. Rather, the problem that I think most readers will have with their description of the classical style is its tendency to proliferate and yet still remain an apparently bounded, non-contradictory entity.

The first instance of this relates to the question of defining ‘style’. The authors do not offer a definition that either limits its applicability to an instantiation of the use of a specific set of techniques, in the manner of Barry Salt, or, recognising that the use of techniques always implies some notion of values, choose to stabilise their delineation in terms of some notion of visual ideology.²⁶ Rather they elect, using Mukarovsky’s theory of the norms that condition the artwork, to prioritise aesthetic norms – excluding ‘ethico-socio-political’ norms or rather treating them as noteworthy when they have an aesthetic function. This means, in the example they choose, that the heterosexual romance is only significant insofar as it takes on the aesthetic function of a ‘typical motivation for the principal line of action’ (p 5). The extent to which formal considerations can act as an alibi for valorising a specific pattern of behaviour, way of life, etc, as opposed to content operating as a mere alibi for form is not something that by definition the authors need to discuss. In a like manner, the decision to focus on aesthetic norms as the context for other norms means that those others – technical, material norms as well as political – only take on significance in the terms that aesthetic norms do: ‘the only goal of the aesthetic norm is to permit artworks to come into existence’ (p 4).

Thus it is necessary to assume that the criterion of aesthetic pertinence governs the scrutiny of the sample. This restriction is complicated still further, and at the same time rendered more comprehensive in the range of its interpretation, by the elaboration of style into three levels of increasing complexity: instantiation of devices; relations of (paradigmatic) substitution between devices subtended by systems of narrative logic, narrative time and narrative space; relations between systems in which narrative logic dominates time and space by rendering these latter as the ‘scenes’ of personalised causality.

We can, then, characterise the classical Hollywood style by its stylistic elements, by its stylistic systems, and most abstractly, by the relations it sets up among those systems. (pp 6–7)

Such a specification, while useful as a means for analysing the various levels of representation that operate within a text, nevertheless carries the singular disadvantage of obviating the possibility of stylistic transformation or change. Should one of the elements shift, compensatory mechanisms realign the overall relationships. Accordingly, the notion of ‘figures of expression’ disequilibrating the narrative is ruled out of consideration. A striking, if not entirely consistent, example is given by Thompson in a subsequent interview:

*You have shot-reverse-shot between Susan Alexander and Charles Foster Kane in Citizen Kane. They are fifty feet apart in their house in Xanadu and you are looking over her shoulder at him and over his shoulder at her but you still have shot-reverse-shot and it is still a conversation scene and the scene will typically be rather similar to what it would be if it were shot with the people three feet apart.*²⁷

So much for the grain of the text.

Finally, not only do matters of meaning and theme receive recognition only insofar as they function aesthetically as bearers of style, but film *per se* becomes identified with its formal articulation or its style. Thus, in deploying the formalist distinction between *fabula* and *syuzhet*, which the authors claim is roughly correspondent to the story/plot distinction, *syuzhet* is defined as the totality of formal and stylistic devices in the film or, in effect, 'the film before us'—devices, systems of narrative logic, space and time in a relation of dominance. *Fabula* is subsequently defined as the spectator's mental construct, 'a structure of inferences' made 'on the basis of selected aspects of the plot' (p 12). Narration is subsequently rendered as that aspect of the *syuzhet*/plot that transmits 'story information' (p 24).

In his *Narration in the Fiction Film*, David Bordwell revises this formulation, defining 'narration as the all-inclusive process which uses both *syuzhet* and style to cue spectators to construct a *fabula* or story' with the definition of style restricted to a characteristic use of cinematic technique and plot retaining its original meaning²⁸. This reformulation, the reader is told, does not affect the analytical and descriptive claims made in *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*. But this is too coy, since obviously the specification *there* does. Ambiguously equating film with its plot and collaterally plot with style allows the authors to treat meaning as an effect, rather than a constitutive moment, of the discursive practices of film-making. If it is an error to see the 'cinematic apparatus' as a mere channel for the transmission of meaning, it is no less an error to see meaning as only arising out of the technical properties of the channel. This trend of analysis probably accounts for what many may regard as the most extraordinary feature of the text, that its treatment of the role of ideology within the occupational confines of the film-making community (Hollywood) is confined to an examination of various 'recipe' texts, technical specifications and the like, that debate or prescribe how to deliver or render a narrative, an image, without exhibiting a great deal of curiosity about the social or political values of what is rendered. In this respect, what the authors have elected to delineate is the bad faith of what Habermas has termed a para-ideology: a set of technical specifications, standards and rules that become an end in themselves, excluding questions of value by postulating the necessity of following technical guidelines.²⁹

In summary, the effect of these definitional shifts and treatments is primarily to effect a collapse of the *plane of content*—with its substance of social values and forms of thematic organisation—into the *plane of*

²⁷ 'The Formalist from Iowa...', op cit, pp11-12. The general position derives clearly from the decision to treat the constancy of the classical paradigm as resting on its formal relationships and to treat stylistic innovations as minor recalibrations of the system. See David Bordwell's discussion of Gregg Toland and deep focus, p 345 ff, which manages to attribute both great and little effect to Toland's innovations. On figuration see Dudley Andrew, *Concepts in Film Theory*, Oxford University Press, 1984, chapter 9.

²⁸ David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, op cit, p 344.

²⁹ See Claus Mueller, *The Politics of Communication*, Oxford University Press, pp 108-9.

³⁰ For the term 'expressive totality', see Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar, *Reading Capital*, London, New Left Books, 1970, p 17.

³¹ As the following suggests: 'If you came out for socialism in films, the producer might say, "I think you're going too heavy on that. Change some of those lines." But if you said, "Shoot in this different way," he would throw you off the lot and have you run out of town on grounds of professional incompetence': Abraham Polonsky, cited in David Talbot and Barbara Zheutlin (eds), *Creative Differences*, Boston, South End Press, 1978, p 92. For an earlier attempt to link the role of style and political suppression, see Mitch Tuchman, *The Structure of Cinematic Thought, American Political Films 1968-71*, Ph.D., Yale University, 1973.

expression—materials of the medium and structures of technique—the sharpest example of which is the reduction of narrative to 'narrative logic' or the assignment of causality. A secondary feature which, in my view, accounts for the ubiquity of the classical style and its capacity for transcendence to the point of assuming all the trappings of a reified absolute, is the failure of the authors to specify the limits of its operations. Its apparent pervasiveness is an effect of overdefinition—with the catalogue of narrative dominance and clarity, verisimilitude, continuity, stars and spectacle (at one point 'a typical upper class interior', p 296, as a classical principle!) represented as a seamless entity, devoid of internal contradiction.

Nevertheless, to conclude part one of this review on a positive note, the authors have provided a cogent and useful account of a *tendency* within the textual space of the typical studio product. The problems arise when they seek to render this tendency as an ontological constant which exhaustively defines the studio-produced film. This procedure, which makes style the 'Logos' of an expressive totality, means that contradictory tensions within 'classical' film-making are suppressed and, given the global dominance of Hollywood, that alternative modes of representation are only locatable at the margin.³⁰ If, on the other hand, the authors are prepared to see the classical paradigm as a regulatory formation aimed at containing moments of 'excess' within Hollywood's own practices, achieving only moments of unstable equilibrium, then most—but not all—of what is problematic in their account can be reconciled.³¹ Whether they are prepared to take this step is uncertain, but I suspect that in the future use of their work it will be taken for them.

The second part of this review will appear in a 1987 issue of *Screen*.

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CANCELLING POPULAR CULTURE

SEAN CUBITT REPORTS ON THE THREAT TO A UNIQUE COURSE

In 1982 the Open University launched an interdisciplinary course code-named U203 and titled *Popular Culture*. If all goes according to plan, 1987 will be the last year that the course is offered. It will not be replaced. By that time, approximately 6000 undergraduates will have taken the course, by far the largest undergraduate take-up for any cultural studies course in the United Kingdom. Its influence has been as far-ranging as the work of the Birmingham University Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies and of SEFT. Many of its qualities are unique within the Open University. A group of current and former course tutors are preparing, with the Open University Students' Association, to fight for the course's continuation beyond 1987. Why? And why should this local struggle be important for SEFT members and *Screen* readers?

The first intake of students to the Open University was in 1971, after years of development work. Former Labour Prime Minister Harold Wilson still says that it is the achievement he would most like to be remembered by, and one can scarcely disagree. With the exception of the Welfare State, post-war governments have little else to boast of in the UK. In the OU was the will to create a truly accessible university – one that would maintain the academic standards of traditional 'elite' universities but would differ from them in four crucial respects: it would overcome age barriers to education at degree level; it would redress the absence of provision in traditional universities

for part-time study; it would attract a high proportion of working class people, compared to the traditional sites for equivalent education; and finally it would extend outwards to forms of educational disadvantage beyond class, especially to women and to people with mobility problems.

But even in the early days it was clear that the University had a long way to go. In 1976, Robert Pike was able to write of the OU that 'the various individuals and groups supporting its foundation were led by its widely publicised "openness" to under-estimate substantially the inevitably socially and educationally selective elements of a university-level institution which expects students to spend about 12 hours a week in study sustained over a period of nine months annually for a period of between 3–6 years'.¹ In fact the OU has never lived up to its felt potential for encouraging self-improvement and upward mobility in the most seriously disadvantaged areas of the community. This has been a result of a variety of factors – relevance of courses to the urgent financial and employment needs of potential students, length of study (though short courses are increasingly on offer) and, of course, money. Crucially, during the Thatcherite assaults on university education over the last five years, the OU, despite being funded

¹ Robert M Pike, 'A Degree of Difference – Thoughts Provoked by the Report of Naomi Mackintosh and Judith Calder on the First Year Intake of Students at the Open University', *Institutional Research Newsletter* no 1, 1976.

directly by the Department of Education and Science rather than the University Grants Committee, has taken more than its share of cuts, including a 10 per cent staff reduction. Tuition fees have risen by 27.4 per cent in the '80s, books, travel, correspondence tuition and childcare are all more expensive, and fewer local education authorities are prepared to award students the discretionary grants which they can claim, due to their own budget cuts.

In this atmosphere of monetarist curtailment of educational opportunity across the board, adult education has tended to suffer even more than schools and colleges. This despite the avowed intention of the Thatcher government to provide retraining for the long-term unemployed, especially in the industries that have found favour in its 'post-industrial' strategy, the so-called 'sunrise' industries of telecommunications, information technology, tourism, finance, fashion and the media. The fact that the OU provided some of the best available courses in precisely these areas and others such as light engineering and electronics at a lower unit cost than any other institution has been ignored. Crucially, the universities generally and the OU in particular have been seen as hot-beds of socialism, dangerously autonomous, fiercely protecting their academic freedom from governmental control. In place of the OU, the government has established, through the centrally-controlled Manpower Services Commission, the Open College of the Air, designed to provide a specifically employment-orientated and instrumental form of education. The OU's charter calls upon it 'to provide education of University and professional standards for its students and to promote the educational well-being of the community generally'.² It is unlikely that the Open College will have any such liberal aspirations.

U203's position in the Open University was always tenuous. The coding denotes that it falls in the 'U'-area, a small sample of courses including *Third World Studies* and *The Changing Experience of Women*, which are produced by course teams drawn from across the University's faculties specifically to prepare courses of an interdisciplinary nature. Signs of its genesis can be read in *Screen Education*, in many articles that later were to become course units, but especially in Tony Bennett's article 'Popular Culture: A

"Teaching Object"'.³ What marks it out from other courses, such as the third-level course on Mass Communications cited above, or that course's replacement, *Beliefs and Ideologies*, is a particular attention not only to texts and institutions, but to audiences and especially to lived cultures.

The course opens with a case history of Christmas, as history, textual theme and cultural practice. It goes on to address radio, cinema, television, holidays, pop, photography, education and the state, drawing on a range of theoretical sources from E P Thompson to Theodor Adorno, from phenomenology to historical research, from Leavis to Bourdieu. What makes it manageable for students, the vast majority of whom have never bathed in Barthes or grappled with Gramsci, is the highly structured, if at times patronising, way in which the materials are presented, drawing on TV and radio programmes and audio cassettes as well as heavily illustrated course units and back-up printed materials, tutorials, tutor-marked assignments and, crucially, the Summer School, which students attend for a week at Preston, Lancashire.

I want to dwell on the Summer School here. It comes at a point when the students have fought their way through the densest theoretical elements of the course, and have arrived at Colin Mercer's excellent but demanding unit on Pleasure. The Summer School is designed to cope with their difficulties, to work through concepts of hegemony, ideology and pleasure, to provide spaces where students can air their problems with the course and pursue their learning in new directions. Alongside a range of other activities, each student follows three modules of 1 1/2 days each: 'Stars', focusing on Monroe and Eastwood and dealing specifically with theories of narrative, spectacle and identification; 'Images of the Nation', which investigates and problematises the production of 'Britishness'; and 'Blackpool', whose themes are summarised on one tutor's T-shirt as 'ozone, Bill Cotton, Coralisation' (health spas, quality

² Quoted in Susan Triesman, 'OU Dossier: The Inside Story', Unit 9, *Mass Communications and Society*, DE 353, Open University, 1976.

³ *Screen Education* 34, Spring 1980.

Perhaps the best way to indicate the pedagogical implications of the study of Blackpool is to quote from a letter from a student at this year's Summer School, Rachel Murrell:

Throughout the week there seemed to be a tacit agreement to allow students to maintain a distance between themselves and the cultural forms they were studying. Thus racist, sexist and homophobic 'jokes' went unchallenged. We are fully aware that this was not a socialist or feminist conference, and that it was not solely the responsibility of tutors to tackle such issues. Nevertheless some of us felt that more could have been done to problematise such 'humour' within the teaching framework. Where better than a U203 Summer School?

*In this context, various people argued that the distinction between two kinds of popular culture—texts and lived experience—was not sufficiently brought out during the week. By letting students 'view' Blackpool in the same way that they 'view' **Some Like It Hot**, the question of why and how we derive pleasure from the tits-and-bums of the Central Pier loses significance. Surely the Blackpool module at least provides an opportunity to ask how those tits-and-bums speak to our day-to-day attitudes towards sexuality and the social order and it does so even more than the Stars module because it is dealing with lived experience.⁴*

It is precisely this order of challenge that the pedagogies and contents of the Summer School are designed to raise, though within the constraints of an institution where it is impossible for staff to fail to respect the opinions and attitudes of adult students, or to enforce an obligatory anti-racist and anti-sexist stance for reasons already explored in *Screen* in another context.⁵ The study of lived cultures operates in the course not as a distinct element but precisely as a pedagogy which directs students from studying what is 'out there' (e.g. texts) towards what is 'in here' (attitudes, pleasures, ideas), and does so by introducing the terms in which Murrell's questions can be posed.

Originally designed to have a six year life, some units of U203 are undoubtedly ready to be altered. Its Summer School is more expensive than most to run as it is the only one held at the Lancashire centre (most Summer Schools are held in major centres with more than one course held there, cutting overheads and administration costs). And the course team are now scattered

across the globe, with the course administered by a holding group at the OU's centre, Walton Hall in Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire. The final problem is that heads of faculties have their work cut out defending their own courses from cuts: there is no institutional base within the OU from which to defend the 'U'-area, except for the largely part-time staff who actually teach it.

Part-time tutors would argue that they are perfectly capable of providing the necessary re-writes, both of units and of Summer School modules, as in fact many have done effectively in their teaching practice. The Open University has a provision for what is called 'rolling re-writes', re-writing individual units of a course as they go out of date. In fact a conference of course staff was held in December 1982 to discuss precisely this aspect, with agreement reached that priorities for development were issues of gender and race. But the cuts of 1983 curtailed the possibility of doing so, despite the success of the course, not only in terms of pass rates, but also in introducing students to other areas of the OU, and perhaps most of all, through the study of lived cultures, in validating students' own life experience as a viable basis for learning. There is now no other course in the University which uses such a pedagogy, with the sole exception of another 'U'-area course, *Changing Experience of Women*, which is due to finish its life in 1988. Losing the unique contribution of these two courses to undergraduate life would remove from the University a crucial link between study and real life, beyond the instrumental prospects of promotion and financial gain.

In order to save the course, course tutors are offering to re-write the Blackpool module so that the Summer School—the vital week in the academic year where for once the students have the benefit of face-to-face teaching and advice—can take place at a larger centre, such as Brighton, which cannot offer the specificity of Blackpool's working-class, Northern carnival but is still a major seaside resort much of whose past and present has been documented at the University of Sussex and Brighton Polytechnic.

⁴ Letter to course tutors, August 12, 1986.

⁵ See Chris Richards, 'Anti-Racist Initiatives', *Screen* September-October 1986, vol 27 no 5, pp 74-79.

Other time-bound units – on youth cultures, for example – are relatively easily supplemented with cheap printed materials to bring them into the mid-'80s. Indeed, many tutors already do so, with sessions on the urban uprisings of 1981 and subsequently, on the Royal Weddings, the Malvinas war, and Live Aid, to name but a few.

More than one SEFT member has had a first taste of media studies and cultural studies in U203, and many will have used units and programmes in their own work. In fact, U203 is the only course in the entire OU, with the sole exception of *Changing Experience*, with a serious commitment to media studies, despite the University's dependence on media technologies for distance learning. The wealth of new material spawned by the course, especially in published form, and including at least two more collections – on Blackpool and on romantic

fiction – which are in the pipeline, are proof that the course is not dying: it is waiting to be killed. The 'U'-area's commitment to media education and to lived experience is vital to the Open University. And the OU is central to any policy geared towards education as a right for life.

I can't think of a better way to end than by quoting from the Preface to a recent collection edited by three of U203's original course team: 'Our dedication of this book to U203 staff and students is meant as a gesture of solidarity with a concept, and with those struggling to defend it, which we hope, against the odds, will survive the glacial ministrations which currently masquerade as an educational policy.'⁶ While it is essential to accommodate SEFT's long-term project of encouraging media education with the bleak educational landscape of contemporary Britain, we should not be prepared to see major bridgeheads such as U203 go under, not without a fight.

Sean Cubitt writes here in a personal capacity.

⁶ Tony Bennett, Colin Mercer, Janet Woollacott (eds), *Popular Culture and Social Relations*, Milton Keynes, Open University Press, 1986.

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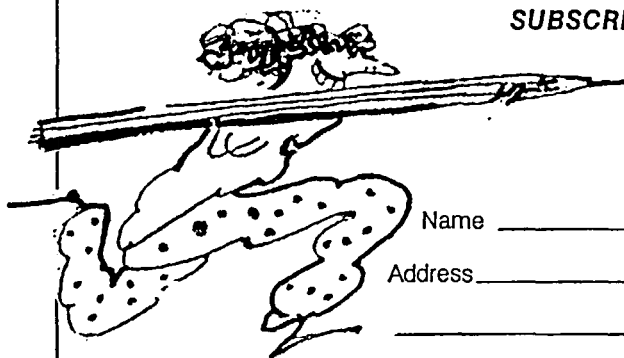
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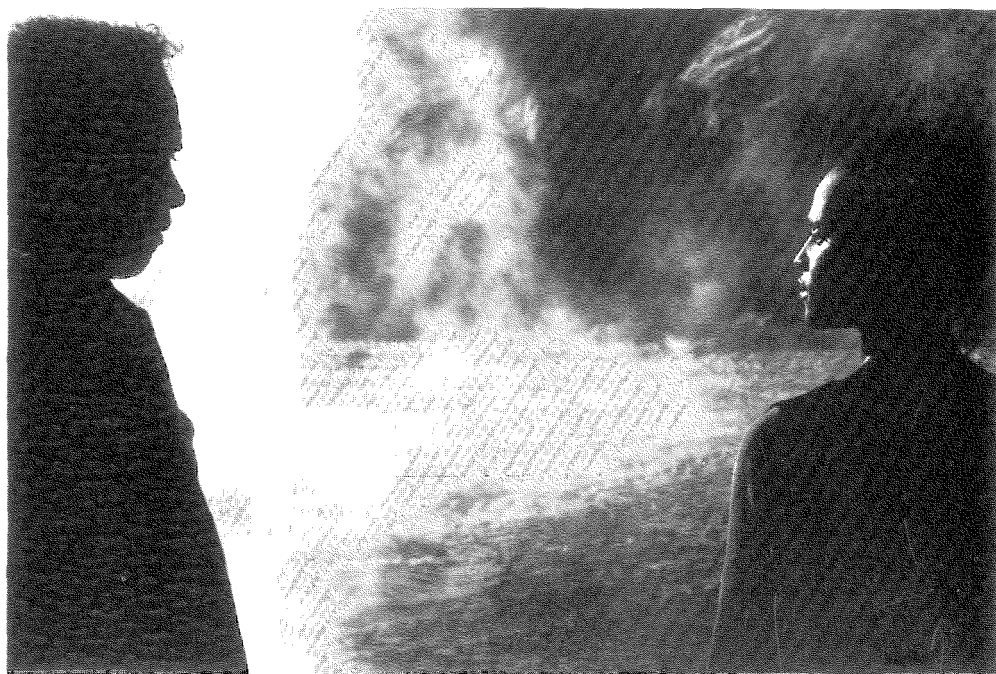
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THIRD CINEMA AT EDINBURGH

REFLECTIONS ON A PIONEERING EVENT,
BY KOBENA MERCER



Questioning 'community': *The Passion of Remembrance*, first feature of the black British workshop Sankofa.

It would be best to describe the conference on Third Cinema at this year's Edinburgh Film Festival¹ as a surface of emergence. Structured around this flexible and open-ended term for independent film practices in the geo-political spaces of the Third World and its metropolitan diaspora(s), the event brought together film-makers, scholars, cultural activists and critics from Africa, India, Sri Lanka, the United States and Britain. The three days of intense debate, and screenings of new and rarely seen films, provided an international frame of reference for a range of emerging differences in approach to cinema as a site of cultural struggle.

The term 'Third Cinema' was first coined by

the Argentinian film-makers Octavio Getino and Fernando Solanas. With Glauber Rocha's call for a 'New Cinema' and Julio García Espinosa's manifesto for an 'Imperfect Cinema', it marked the debate on the aesthetics and politics of film in struggles for cultural liberation that characterised the radical Latin American film culture of the 1960s. The term differentiated an ideologically combative film practice from both the commodity products of dominant film

¹ 'Third Cinema: Theories and Practices', held at the 40th Edinburgh International Film Festival, August 11-13, 1986, and sponsored by the British Film Institute.

96 industries and the cinematic values of 'auteurism'. It has since been theoretically developed, and its reference expanded, by Ethiopian scholar Teshome Gabriel as a more general framework for the study not just of films made in the Third World, but of oppositional film practices that articulate cultural struggles.² In this sense the concept of a 'Third Cinema' cuts across the boundaries of national cinemas and, as Jim Pines and Paul Willemen emphasised in their opening remarks at the conference, its very flexibility seems appropriate for the designation of a variety of *emerging* trends in radical film theory and practice. Because it does not function as a rigid classificatory term and seeks to avoid setting up yet another hegemonic norm for 'correct' film-making, the idea seems particularly relevant to the emergent black independent film sector in Britain. It would be useful to place the event in this local historical context so as to draw out some of the issues debated.

Within the terms of this specific conjuncture, Third Cinema continued a conversation on the politics of race, nation and ethnicity in the cultural institution of cinema which began with the Black Film Festival, organised by Jim Pines, at the Commonwealth Institute and the National Film Theatre in 1982. That event enabled a young generation of black film workshops, such as Black Audio Film Collective, Ceddo and Sankofa, to make links with their Afro-American counterparts. Its success also demonstrated an incredible hunger for images among black audiences in Britain. In the wake of the political events of 1981 and the advent of Channel Four, it pinpointed a keen interest for black interventions in film and television, a new threshold of cultural struggle around the image.³ The subsequent Third Eye symposium organised by June Givanni and Parminder Vir and the Greater London Council in 1983 consolidated links between film-makers on a global scale by prioritising issues of production, finance, distribution and exhibition. By highlighting the common concern with the relative underdevelopment of an economic infrastructure for independent black and Third World film, Third Eye drew attention to the parallels between centre and periphery in terms of a struggle for access to the technology of cinema. At another level, it also reflected the

impact of black and Third World feminisms, as issues of women's intervention on either side of the camera were brought into the foreground of debate.⁴ In the context of the radical policies on cultural production pursued by the GLC administration, their Anti Racist Film Programme of 1984 broke new ground in terms of exhibition strategies. Given that many mainstream distributors refuse to take on Third World films, regarding them as of 'minority interest' and therefore 'marginal', the GLC's local initiative helped build up wider audiences by setting up, on a small scale, alternative networks of exhibition among schools, colleges, community centres and arts groups. Equally, if not more importantly, each of these events has nurtured the development of black independents by simply showing films from the Third World and the United States which otherwise would have been unseen and unknown.

The series of screenings and discussions organised under the theme of Cultural Identities earlier this year at the Commonwealth Institute shifted the terrain of debate to focus on issues of aesthetics, readings and theoretically informed critique. The event was interesting in terms of bringing First World film-makers and critics into a much closer dialogue with the questions raised by black and Third World film texts. In any event, it rendered visible the volume of issues that arise from film practices (such as those of the black independents in Britain) that are shaped and informed by a critical engagement both with Third World traditions of cultural struggle and the theoretical discourses that have characterised Euro-American debates on film. The Edinburgh Third Cinema conference demonstrated that such conditions of existence, producing new forms of work at the interface of different traditions, are by no means unique to the situation here in Britain. They pertain to the work of a number of hitherto isolated film-makers, activists and critics operating in a

² See his *Third Cinema in the Third World: The Aesthetics of Liberation*, Michigan, Ann Arbor, UMI Research Press, 1982.

³ See 'Media Focus', special issue of *Arrage* on film, video and television, edited by Jim Pines, no 3/4, 1983.

⁴ The 'Third Eye' symposium has now been documented in *Third Eye: Struggle for Black and Third World Cinema*, Greater London Council, Race Equality Unit, 1986.

diversity of geographical, institutional and professional locations. The ambiguities of the concept of a Third Cinema provided enough common ground to highlight many areas of overlapping concerns and preoccupations. The convergences suggest a renewal of passion for debate on the politics of film and cinema, something worth taking note of in the face of the apparent exhaustion, in Britain, of much of the once-innovative film theory of the '70s. And the ambiguities cut both ways as the conference exposed a spread of unresolved tensions that surfaced both in the encounter between First and Third Worlds, and within the Third World itself.

Teshome Gabriel's project of describing and theorising 'those essential qualities Third World films possess rather than those they may seem to lack'⁵ has been attacked by Latin American film specialist Julianne Burton as 'essentialist'. Burton has argued that an underlying 'Third Worldism' imposes a fictive unity and homogeneity that ignores the diversity of conditions of production and reception of Third World film texts.⁶ The terms of their dispute/debate turn on the question of the adequacy of Euro-American critical theory for the analysis of Third Cinema. While Gabriel has registered the issue of its latent Euro/ethnocentrism, Burton defends the role of the 'non-native' critic in terms of encouraging a wider interest in Third World texts in the First World. However, in the absence of the unfortunately unavailable Gabriel, her Edinburgh presentation failed to confront the problem of the quasi-imperial division of labour (the Third World produces films, the First World produces the criticism and theory to 'make sense' of them). Nor was that duality resolved by Burton's description of her own position as 'neither' able to identify with her native US culture 'nor' to regard herself as a member of another.

This 'neither/nor'-ism is inherently problematic, as it displaces the possibility of a self-reflexive approach to the critique of Eurocentrism by invoking an image of the 'free-floating' intellectual able to transcend boundaries (imaginary, symbolic or real?) of ethnic/national difference at will. One way out of this all too familiar Third/First World dilemma, if it can be simplified in terms of the metaphor of 'race', was put forward at the BFI's Summer School on

Echoes of Empire last year. As Jim Pines argued, 'the analysis of racism and racial representation has to take on board the "fact of whiteness" There needs to be a radical shift away from concentrating on the "victims", i.e. the black (Third World) subject as racial/analytical problematic, and more attention directed at the dominant and highly problematic "white" subject.'⁷ As it stands, Burton's practical criticism does not theorise 'whiteness' or 'First Worldness' as conditions of its own enunciation, thus inadvertently confirming Gabriel's point that 'the barrier to dialogue is ... the terms of dialogue itself'⁸.

This should not however obscure the fact that there are issues which need clarification in Gabriel's work. Certainly the 'speculative' (rather than empirical) quality of his theorisation of a Third Cinema aesthetic must be seen as a constructive response to the marginalisation of Third World cinema (and African cinema in particular) as a worthwhile area of study. Yet at certain points his stark contrast between values encoded in filmic discourse (the valorisation of landscape in long shot versus the 'psychologism' of the close-up) seems formalist and in need of more detailed contextualisation. While his paper on popular memory as a resource of cultural struggle (presented on video at Edinburgh) suggested that folkloric logic disrupts and critiques the hierarchies of Western dichotomies (subject/object, good/evil, etc), his own methodology often reproduces conventional conceptual dualisms to think a general or 'total' theory of a Third Cinema aesthetic as such. Gabriel takes his major reference points from the marxism of Fanon and Cabral, yet a set of more contemporary directions in the critique of imperialism, influenced by the ground-clearing

⁵ Teshome Gabriel, 'Towards a Critical Theory of Third World Films', *Third World Affairs*, London 1985, p 355.

⁶ See Julianne Burton, 'Marginal Cinemas and Mainstream Critical Theory', *Screen* May-August 1985, vol 26 no 3/4, pp 2-21.

⁷ 'Black Film Making', *The Media Education Journal* no 2, 1986, p 33.

⁸ 'Colonialism and "Law and Order" Criticism', *Screen* vol 27 no 3/4, 1986, pp 140-147.

⁹ See in this context, Edward W Said, 'Orientalism Reconsidered', *Race and Class*, vol 27 no 3, 1985, and Angela McRobbie, 'Strategies of Vigilance: Interview with Gayatri Spivak', *Block*, no 10, 1985.

work of Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak, surfaced at Edinburgh⁹. The new points of departure in critical theory and textual practice in the work of Geeta Kapur, Homi Bhabha, Trin T Minh-ha and Laleen Jayamanne share in common a desire to step outside the stasis of 'opposition' and suggest a 'deconstructive' approach to the critique of Eurocentrism which appropriates post-structuralist theories to interrogate their limitations, absences and silences.

A key theme here is the question of 'otherness' and its ambiguities. Jayamanne's film, *A Song of Ceylon*, re-articulates an interest in feminist debates on psychoanalysis, hysteria and the body by exploring the 'body in excess' as it moves between Asian and European idioms of expression. Her work suggests the impossibility of retrieving cultural differences in any pristine state. Similarly, Trin T Min-ha's new film, *Naked Spaces (Living is Round)*, opens onto the issues of 'otherness' and of 'authenticity' that structure the discourses of ethnographic film-making, questioning the idea that "Correct" cultural film-making... implies that Africans show Africa, Asians, Asia and Euro-Americans... the World'. However, while her innovative idea of an 'Inappropriate Other' suggested a strategy for a non-authoritative representation of difference, it also seemed to echo aspects of a transcendental 'neither/nor'-ism.¹⁰ Homi Bhabha's presentation offered rich possibilities opened up by a re-reading of Fanon's theories of cultural struggle in the light of Lacanian psychoanalysis. Bhabha's distinction between 'cultural diversity', as a strategy of colonial or post-colonial governability, and 'cultural differences', which split the imaginary unity of the subject to produce new forms of knowledge engendered by the frictions and uncertainties of difference itself, suggest new ways of thinking the terms of contemporary cultural struggles. In particular, his idea that the key index of a qualitative transformation in cultural struggle is marked by the intensification of the indeterminacy of signs and meanings seems highly relevant to the cultural politics of 'ethnicity' in Britain.¹¹

In a different way Afro-American scholar Clyde Taylor also invited a critical re-think of the very foundations of film criticism. His paper problematised the category of 'aesthetics',

homing in on the inherent 'race-ism' of Western discourses on 'beauty' that debar the black subject, *de facto* and *de jure*, from access to its aesthetic ideals. His arguments drew substantively on the recent work of Sylvia Wynter which argues that the crisis of the post-Enlightenment episteme demands a 're-writing of knowledge', that is, a disarticulation of the orders of power and knowledge inscribed in Western modernity.¹² However, Taylor's radical 'bracketing' of aesthetics was misconstrued as an argument for 'cultural nationalism'. Rather than stimulating the formulation of fresh criteria for the evaluation of cultural/art practices, his paper elicited anxieties and divisions among participants, notably between adherents of post-structuralist approaches and those who opposed them. To be able to explore such differences so as to *learn* from them it would be necessary to re-insert the issue of the uneven development that makes the Third World such a 'messy' space of heterogeneity. We need to be able to discuss (non-divisively) the variousness of different national/cultural traditions, and especially with regard to film cultures, the marked differences between French, Spanish and English-speaking zones. For one reason or another (the paucity of Latin American film-makers and critics present, for instance) this was something that didn't happen at Edinburgh.

The expression of such differences should not really be that surprising given that the Third World (both territory and map) so often functions as a symbol of Chaos that will mirror the First World's image of itself as Order. However, the idea of a Third Cinema has another dimension in that it also includes the concept of a diaspora. For obvious historical reasons, this notion seems to have more of an appeal for Afro-American and Afro-Caribbean film-makers as a way of exploring common

¹⁰ On her earlier film, *Re-assemblage*, see Constance Penley and Andrew Ross, 'Interview with Trin T. Minh-ha', *Camera Obscura* no 13-14, 1986, pp 87-103.

¹¹ See also Bhabha's new introduction, 'Remembering Fanon' in the recent re-print of *Black Skin, White Masks*, London, Pluto, 1986.

¹² See Sylvia Wynter, 'The Ceremony Must be Found: After Humanism', *Boundary 2*, USA, 1985 and her outline of cultural politics in, *CLR James: His Life and Works*, London, Allison and Busby, 1986.



After Winter: Sterling Brown—oppositional film-making directed by the exiled Ethiopian Haile Gerima.

differences.¹³ Here there are interesting overlaps around issues of audience and the critique of dominant forms of representation. Characterising Third Cinema as a battle zone between the 'toy soldiers' of cultural colonialism—that is, the alienating spectacle of Hollywood—and embryonic alternatives that seek to break with its codes and conventions, Haile Gerima re-instated a passionate case for an 'oppositional' cinema urgently needed to counteract the demoralising effects of the dominant movie industry among black audiences from Lagos to Los Angeles. Gerima's position points towards a re-engagement with the question of how dominant ideologies dominate. His concern with their effects on the black and Third World spectator raises a question about the adequacy of the Althusserian-inspired study of ideology that shaped debate in the '70s. Also addressing dominant media, Ayoka Chinzera argued that the rhetoric of 'positive versus negative' images (which has played a large part in black critiques of media stereotypes in Britain too) is ultimately more disempowering than enabling for black film-

making. Television programmes like *The Cosby Show*, produced in response to the open market for 'positive' images, have only led to a new system of stereotypes, glossing over much 'unfinished business' behind the so-called 'negative' image. The US film-maker's new documentary on child abuse, *Silent Sounds Screaming*, signals a determination to work through complex issues unthinkable within the static polarisation of 'positive and negative'.

The critique of media stereotypes has informed the counter-practices of the black independents in Britain, but what is significant now is the plurality of aesthetic and political options that characterise their practices. On the one hand, members of the Asian workshop Re-Take argued for a realist aesthetic as a way of engaging the community as their target audience—a position embodied in *Sanctuary Challenge*, their new

¹³ The notion of a cinematic diaspora already figures in the Film and Lecture series, *Journey Across Three Continents*, organised by Third World Newsreel in North America in 1985.

documentary film about struggles against deportation in the context of British immigration law. However, it was argued that the 'community' does not exist as a homogeneous body politic, but harbours many, often antagonistic, positions and opinions: as such there is no one 'reality' that awaits representation but a number of competing 'versions' that struggle for predominance. Taking such a position, Sankofa, for example, seek to employ experimental strategies as a way of intervening in collective debates. Their earlier film *Territories* anchors itself within the 'documentary' format only to ambush the assumption of any one authoritative voice or 'look', thus opening up a number of points of view on an event as complex as Notting Hill Carnival.¹⁴ And from another context, Med Hondo's epic *West Indies* (made in 1979 but hitherto unscreened here) also states the case for an experimental approach to the film apparatus. Staging the stories of domination and resistance, exploitation and migration that have shaped the Caribbean on a reconstructed slave ship in a deserted warehouse, it deploys this 'Brechtian' device to draw in other theatrical elements from the genre of the musical and

disrupt the idea of history as narrative continuity. Its carnivalesque quality sets up a dialogic discourse that questions our 'knowledge' of past and present and invites the spectator into an active reading of the text.

In the specific context of the black independents in Britain, the range of choices – documentary, narrative, experimental – available today must be situated historically. It marks a shift from the almost exclusive commitment to realism (as a mode of counter-representation against the effects of the dominant media) that characterised the practices of an earlier generation of independent practitioners such as Horace Ove. But the current debate has gone beyond the simple alternatives of realism and anti-realism. Significantly, it is around the issue of audiences and 'community' that a new kind of 'third option' has emerged, most clearly argued for at Edinburgh by H O Nazareth. Rejecting the labels of both 'multi-culturalism' and 'anti-racism', he opposed the assumption that black

¹⁴ See Jim Pines, 'Territories: Interview with Isaac Julien', *Framework* no 26/27, 1985, pp 2-9.



Addressing the community: *Street Warriors*, made by the black British workshop Ceddo.

film practice should devote itself to the expression of 'ethnic protest'. There is a valid point here, but his related argument for rejecting the 'community' as reference point or addressee of black film discourse caused much concern, as it seemed to imply an unaccountable auteurism as the only alternative. Illustrating his argument with his experience of adverse criticism while working on a film on domestic violence within the Asian community, Nazareth argued that the 'community' functions as a censor. This position seems a difficult one to maintain. It would be hard to construe the Bengali community's vocal displeasure with Farrukh Dhondy's recent BBC TV drama, *King of the Ghetto*, for instance, as a form of censorship.

Although it is the case (and perhaps it shouldn't be) that black film-makers are often held to ideological ransom by the question, 'Who do you make your films for?', the space of community as a terrain of contested political opinions cannot be simply ignored or rejected *tout court*. Ceddo, for instance, place a great deal of emphasis (as does their new film, *Street Warriors*) on the community as the addressee of their practice. Moreover, Haile Gerima's triangular model for the social/cultural interaction of film-maker/story-teller, activist/critic and audience/community underlines the issues of modes of address, networks of exhibition and forms of criticism that an 'oppositional' black film practice *must* take on board. The new 'neo-liberal' option, which embraces criteria of 'professionalism' at the centre of its practice, needs to be located in the contradictory influence of Channel Four as the principal founder of 'independent' work. Either way, precisely because of this relationship, the fortunes of this new tendency will be one to watch.

In the midst of this questioning of 'community', Sankofa's first feature production, *The Passion of Remembrance*, is especially interesting with its underlying theme of diversities and differences *within* black communities. As it intersperses between a narrative account of black experiences in '80s Britain a dialogue on the past and future of political protest, the film weaves a rich texture of questions about the role of memory in shaping our sense of identity. In this way it explores features of contemporary politics in Britain

which escape simple explanations based on 'race' alone, insisting on the multiple elements of race, class, gender and sexuality that must figure in the consciousness of the political present. Beyond its intrinsic interest, the film is also important as a critical intervention that places issues of gender in the foreground, which may be seen as an effect of the way that black feminisms have re-shaped the terrain of debate in the sphere of cultural politics. This may in turn be seen as analogous to the creative effects of the proliferation of writing by black women on feminist politics¹⁵. Certainly such a priority of gender is not 'new', as earlier independent films such as Menelik Shabazz's *Burning an Illusion* demonstrate. But what adds an important dimension today is the parallel interest in racial/sexual politics signified by the recent mainstream success of films such as *My Beautiful Laundrette*. Given the peculiarities of Spielberg's rendition of Alice Walker's *Color Purple*, the debates around these commercial films may stimulate a wider reception and a wider audience for the more challenging work coming from the independent sector. In this respect it would be worth taking note of the cross-over style of Spike Lee's problematic 'comedy' of sexual (or sexist?) manners, *She's Gotta Have It*, a curious film that implicitly raises the question of *how* to distinguish mainstream/independent cinemas.

As a surface of emergence the Third Cinema conference raised more questions than it could answer. At the level of debates on aesthetics it registered the limitations of populist rhetoric and exposed new directions for theory and critique. Kenyan novelist Ngugi Wa Thiongo's suggestion that the struggles of the Third World resonate in the popular memory and imagination of all social groups and peoples contesting oppression points to the possibilities of a wider, de-marginalised, audience for a Third Cinema. At the level of film practice, the concept may even be relevant for First World practitioners whose modernist strategies have been called into question by both post-modernism and neo-conservatism. In both respects the event has

¹⁵ See in this context, 'Many Voices, One Chant: Black Feminist Perspectives', *Feminist Review* no 17, Autumn 1984.

important implications for institutions with an interest in revitalising an active, independent film culture. The fact its debates were sponsored by the British Film Institute—whereas two or three years ago they would have taken place in the seminars and screenings organised by the Black Audio Film Collective, for instance—

suggests a process of de-marginalisation which will hopefully continue into higher education.

The Passion of Remembrance will be shown at the Metro Cinema, Rupert Street, London W1, December 5-20, 1986.



SCREEN: After Postmodernism

The last few years have seen an explosion of interest in those areas of aesthetic practice and cultural theory known as Postmodernism. So far these debates have centred upon such cultural forms as Fine Art, Architecture, Literature and Television, with significantly less consideration of Cinema. Indeed, there has been little significant dialogue between these newer areas of concern and that school of Film Studies derived from structuralism, psychoanalysis and theories of ideology which shaped so much of the post-'68 writing of journals like *Screen*.

We are therefore calling for papers reviewing the impact of Postmodernism – both as art practice and theory – on Cinema as well as Television and Video (both mainstream and independent/avant-garde). In addition to contributions to the theoretical debates which have been conducted in journals like *New Left Review*, *October*, *New German Critique* and *Art & Text*, papers might address: the relation of Video Art to Postmodernism; feminist responses to the postmodern phenomenon; the question of the 'First World' ethnocentrism of Postmodernism; recent developments in Independent Cinema (e.g. Greenaway, Ruiz, Marker) and their relation to developments in other media influenced by Postmodernism; the increasing role of parody and pastiche in contemporary Hollywood; the examination of comparable trends within popular TV (e.g. Music Video) and 'Art Television'.

Submissions are requested by January 1, 1987.

Inquiries or submissions to: the Editor, *Screen*, 29 Old Compton Street, W1V 5PL, England.

XIth International Congress of Aesthetics: 'Tradition and Innovation in Aesthetics'

Papers on Aesthetics and the Analytic Tradition, the Kantian and Phenomenological Traditions, Critical Theory, Cultural Theory and the Arts are requested for a conference to be held in Nottingham, England, August 29-September 2, 1988.

Offers of papers and enquiries to: Richard Woodfield, Trent Polytechnic, Burton Street, Nottingham NG1 4BU, England.

Afro-Asian Film/Video List

The British Film Institute is currently compiling a comprehensive list of independent film/video practitioners working in the Afro-Asian sector; their productions; films and videos from Africa, the Caribbean, the Indian sub-continent, and the work of Afro-Asian film-makers in the USA, available in Britain.

Film credits, technical details, availability and contract details should be forwarded to: June Giovanni, the British Film Institute, 127 Charing Cross Road, London WC2H 0EA.

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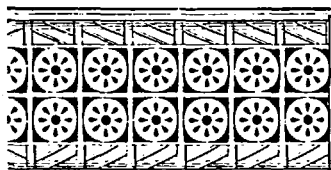
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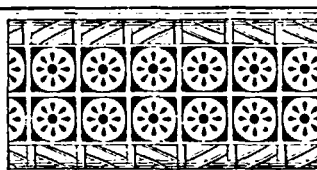
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